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DAYS OF OLD

AND OTHER SERMONS

DAYS OF OLD

AND OTHER SERMONS

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S. A. TIPPLE

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	DAYS OF OLD	9
II.	VISION	23
III.	THE BRIGHT AND THE DARK SIDE	37
IV.	THE PROPHET'S FUNCTION	49
V.	NAHUM AND JONAH	65
VI.	CRUCIFIED AND LIVING	83
VII.	THE VALLEY OF BACA	97
VIII.	ON RECEIVING COMFORT	107
IX.	THE UNTROUBLED HEART	123
X.	OUR WORDS	139
XI.	THE MESSAGE TO HEROD	155
XII.	ENTERING INTO THE CLOUD	169
XIII.	PARABLE OF THE PARTED RAIMENT	185
XIV.	THE DEW OF YOUTH	199
XV.	GOD VISIBLE IN MEN	215
XVI.	THE ASCENSION	227
XVII.	THE CHRIST BEFORE AND BEYOND CHRIST	239
XVIII.	IN MEMORIAM: KING EDWARD VII.	253
	PRAYERS	265

FOREWORD

THE sermons composing this volume are not those, I should like to say, that might have been selected by me for publication had I been able to decipher my manuscript notes, but are a few that happened from time to time to be taken down in shorthand and written out by a hearer, as they were preached; and why these should be published I do not at all know, except that I have been pressed to consent to it, and have only reluctantly consented on the suggestion that some who heard them might care to have them for reading or as a slight memorial of days of fellowship in religious meditation that are no more.

There is nothing else to be offered in justification of their appearing in print, and by those, indeed, who may have listened with profit, perhaps, to the spoken discourse, and may wish and think to find it again in a book, the edifying or stimulating discourse will not be found wholly in the book, however literally reproduced there.

S. A. T.

DAYS OF OLD

"I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. I call to remembrance my song in the night. . . . Will the Lord cast off for ever? and will he be favourable no more? Is his mercy clean gone for ever? Doth his promise fail for evermore? . . . And I said, This is my infirmity; but I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High."—Psalm lxxvii. 5—10.

DAYS OF OLD

THE Psalmist was in a musing mood, the mood into which most of us are wont to fall towards the close of the year—communing with ourselves in the twilight, by the fireside, inclined to be rather unusually thoughtful and reflective—and as with us then, in the closing hours of the year, his musing was of the bygone. They were things of the past that occupied his mind—nor of the near past only, but of the distant also; beginning with the former, with what lay more immediately behind, he went back further, to the long, long ago, recalling "forgotten, far-off things." "I considered the days of old, the years of ancient times." In which particular phrasing—"the *days* of old, the *years* of ancient times"—he makes, whether he meant it or not, a true distinction between memories of the near and distant past. Of what is more remote we may be said to remember no more than the years, not the several days of which they are composed; generally, not circumstantially; in large outline, not in detail. Of so many of the days, with their incidents, their adventures and experiences, nothing is retained; they have

vanished, tone and tint, leaving only in memory's picture gallery some one or two special events, some few particular happenings of the year—a great sorrow, for instance, or a great joy, like the hills visible to the traveller when he pauses to look back upon the road along which he has come, while the low plains and intersecting valleys are lost to sight. Gone from us entirely is a number of the incidents that filled those twelve-month periods of our early youth, to which we mentally revert in writing our autobiography with the pen, or in imagination; they are represented and summed up in two or three reminiscences, and not until later periods are reached do the reminiscences multiply, when, instead of a single recounting page or but half a page, perhaps, many pages may be written.

Very brief, too, is the historical review in which the historian treats of remote centuries, compared with his review or record of last century. There is that of the past, the more ancient, which we can but rehearse in the years of it, and that, less old and nearer, that can be called up before us in the successive days of it.

The Psalmist calls to remembrance a former song of his, something of beauty and delight that had been. "But I will remember," he said, "the years of the right hand of the Most High" —something lofty and sublime. There are memories, and these often the most charming or

affecting with which we are visited at times, that break upon us unsought, like a wave from the sea or a wind that bloweth where it listeth; stirred by some little chance impact or contact, by something casually met or witnessed in passing, by such trifles as an idle word dropped in our hearing, the tone of a voice, the sight of a face, the air of a simple song, or a stray whiff of perfume, a sudden odour caught of certain flowers. We listen to the sound, we catch the smell, and bygones are immediately present with us. There comes, silent, flooding in upon us, what was and is no more, with tears, perhaps, as "from the depths of some divine despair." We are transported in a moment from where we are to other scenes and other times, and live over again a life that had been lived, whether of bliss or pain. The old taste is freshly in our mouth, the old sweetness or bitterness upon our heart. Such magic wands of resurrecting power do touch us at times as we go plodding on our way, and the long dead and buried swarm round about us. But strange enough are the tricks our memory often plays us, reviving not what we would, or might have been expected to remember, but what we would not, or that might have been expected to retain no place in the mind, bringing back not the important event, but instead, or more prominently, some petty, insignificant

incident in connection with it, not the great adventure or experience, but instead, or together with it, and more vividly, some small trivial episode. We forget much of the great occasion or the splendid pageant, and remember some absurdly comic occurrence in the midst of it. Have we not sometimes exclaimed to ourselves, "Why, now, should it have been this—this paltry matter, this meaningless accident, which recurred to us before all, when we began to be retrospective, and were bent, perhaps, on reflecting seriously?"

The Psalmist remembers in the night, in some night, we may suppose, of misery or sadness, his "song," the singing in his heart, the brightness of his condition awhile ago, when, as the patriarch of Uz expressed it, "the candle of the Lord shone on his head, and in its light he walked." And are they not often our songs in the past which memory keeps for our comfort and refreshment rather than our dirges, letting these slip while storing and hoarding those? As when all the pleasure of the travel of some expedition or excursion is remembered, and the little unpleasantnesses that belonged to it, certain vexatious annoyances, are clean forgotten. Yes, the green oasis with its palms and shimmering water, upon which we came in the desert, clings closer and faster to the mind than the scenes of the arid desert stretch; the flowers that charmed us at intervals along the road, than the stones that

bruised or the thorns that occasionally pierced our feet. The ills that were encountered fade sooner for the most part than the thrills and delights of the way, though these may have been fewer and more rare.

But is the darkness of the night softened, its pain soothed and assuaged, by calling to remembrance the song of other days? According to Tennyson, in one of his moods, it is "sorrow's crown of sorrow to remember happier things," and so it is often, doubtless; the darkness and pain suffered are somewhat aggravated by it. We think of the halcyon time once enjoyed, and the existing storm and stress are the harder to bear for the contrast of the prosperity that once was ours, and the present grim adversity is made grimmer, its sharpness accentuated thereby. Yet not seldom, on the contrary, the memory of happier things carries into sorrow something of solace. We dream over them, meditate on them, and, for the moment at least, are lightened and relieved. The "thing of beauty" vanished "is a joy for ever," and a bit of joy in the midst of ugly circumstances, coming back to us in the midst of these, it sheds on us a gleam that tends to mitigate their harsh effect, or lifts us temporarily above it.

But our Psalmist, in considering many things, "the days of old, the years of ancient times," was troubled. "I am so troubled," he says,

" that I can hardly speak." In communing with myself, it has come to this, that my spirit is left wailing despondently, despairingly, "Will God be favourable no more? Is His mercy clean gone for ever? Does His promise fail for evermore?" But then, saying at length, "Nay, this is my infirmity"—only a passing sickness of the mind—he sets himself to remember and ponder what might serve to calm his troubled spirit; seeks to turn and direct his thought toward that. Wise man! for there is always something else to think of when our thinking is distressful or depressing; something which, resolutely courted and entertained, would presently or gradually abate our discomposure and change the cast and current of the soul. There are other facts and realities than those which are tormenting or oppressing you—divert the mind to them; there are other subjects waiting to put you, with your contemplation of them, into a happier frame—have recourse to them; learn the art of commanding the mind to break away from what may be affecting you unwholesomely or disorderingly, and to betake itself for recovery to other things. Here is the cure for many an inward *malaise*, for many a gloomy view indulged or dolorous temper—only to think of something different, to send off the thought elsewhere. Lingering, staying where it is, we are sick; sending it off elsewhere, are shortly made whole.

"In my infirmity," said the Psalmist, "I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High." A peculiar and enigmatical expression. What he meant by it I cannot tell. Anyhow, it speaks to me of escaping from the coarse turmoil, the pricks and teasings of the little into the spacious calm of the great; from the meaner, that harries and frets, to the nobler, that conduces to compose; from one's small personal life, with its worries and confusions, its dissatisfactions and disappointments, to "the pure eternal course of life," "the life that was ere I was born, the life that lasts when I am dead," which has been breathing for thousands of years and will be breathing for thousands of years to come in "the silent stir of birth, when morning purifies the earth"; in the order and constancy of Nature; in the continuous growth and development of humanity, while men appear and disappear; in the continuous stream and tendency of things from more to more; speaks to me of moving up in thought from that which is seen and temporal to that which is unseen and eternal; to the unbroken purpose which through the ages runs, to the "divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will"; to the mysterious power not ourselves that worketh all in all, leads the blind by ways that they know not, and makes for righteousness; losing the particular in some vision of the universal, the units that we are in a sense of

the great Whole, God-filled and informed. It is at once tranquillising and inspiring to get up into this for a time when life is saddening or perturbing. As it was with an eloquent writer of to-day when he stood meditating in the Fens on a multitude of lives that had lived and perished centuries ago, each conscious of its own minute existence, and dimly aware, perhaps, of a vast world of shadowy existences outside it;—when, meditating, he wrote "Somehow, in the thought of this immensity of life unrolling itself persistently through the ages, I felt a strange sense of the unreality of my own little hopes and fears, so terribly urgent and significant to me, so small in relation to the universe. A lesson, maybe, not very cheering or stimulating, yet the truth of it, which at first sight seems insupportable, brings in its wake a thought of intense significance; it hints at an enormous patience, an unceasing, infinite energy, makes the dreams of mortals pale and unsubstantial, assures one that, strive and fret as one may, there is something to be apprehended that men cannot teach or perceive, and leaves in one something of chastening awe, of quiet resignation, and a determination to wait and see what God may be doing for us"—doing for us while we stand in our narrow lot and ply our task to the end of our brief term.

But, in looking back just now upon our own lives during the year or the years, upon what

has been achieved and encountered and come through, let us be wise to forget also, to refuse to dwell upon, some things that have been, things irrevocable, which, dwelt upon, would only mortify or mischievously burden and vex us to no purpose, allowing these to fade out of view and sink into oblivion. The lesson of that past grievous error, failure or folly, the recollection of which is painfully humiliating, gather up and retain, but it, and the humiliation of it, forget, saying to it :—

> "I am free from thee this day,
> That which we two only know
> I forgive and I forgo,
> So thy face no more I meet,
> In the field or in the street."

Revolve and hoard the salutary teaching of the irreparable mistake made in your course, or the weak yielding to temptation which shamed you, but itself, and the shame of it, forget. Turn your back to it and bury it from sight. Of what avail to linger over it, or to stay sighing for the better that might have been? Nothing can be gained by it but useless discomposure and distress, useless and more or less morally enervating. Remember again and treasure in the mind whatever you have met with in others to reverence and admire, whatever of grace or goodness you have found in them, and forget altogether what you have had in them to resent of ill behaviour, or infirmities and failings betrayed amidst their

virtues, except as, for your charity towards them, these may serve to remind you of your own. Among our memories to-day it may be that there is some remembrance with us for the moment, not of the days merely, with their medley of experience, but of our old selves, of what we were in character and quality, compared with what we are—a figure rising before us somewhat different from the figure we now present; and is it seen, perhaps, with a measure of satisfaction and thankfulness, that we have come to excel, by much or little, that figure? are somewhat more finely shaped, more mellowed in tone and feeling, more widely sympathetic, more braced and disciplined by experience, more capable of enduring the hard with patience, and extracting and assimilating good from the evil? Happy they who, reviewing themselves, can be sensible of some such advance and improvement on the past; sensible of having risen on "stepping-stones of their dead selves to higher things." Or is it our misery and disgrace to behold, in the distance behind, a creature comelier and worthier than we are to-day, who lived on a higher plane and nourished in his heart greater ideals, with a fidelity to principle, a moral sensibility, a trouble of aspiration in his breast that we have lost; an old sweeter self which we have fallen below? Anyhow, whether for better or worse, we have undergone a change from what

we were. That is no more, whatever may remain.

"Remains the mist in the air, and the moon in the sky,
The rocks and the mountain grass;

"But you and I have journeyed far
On a long unresting track,
From the souls we were to the souls we are,
A goal whence none go back.

"The dead years rise on the rain-washed wind,
And walk in the world they knew,
But, living or dead, we shall not find
The souls that were I and you."

No, there is no return for us to our former selves, but, if they are irrecoverable, to some other we shall move in the days that are coming; and, if we have degenerated from them, may still acquire, if we will, a handsomer figure than now; may march, if we will, with some labour and strain, to some height above the flats to which we have sunk. There is no lovely might-have-been missed, which may not yet be gained.

"Thank God, a man can grow!
He is not bound
With earthward gaze to creep along the ground:
Though his beginnings be but poor and low,
Thank God! a man can grow.
The fire upon his altars may burn dim,
The torch he lighted may in darkness fail—
And nothing to rekindle it avail—
But, high above his dull horizon's rim,
Arcturus and the Pleiads beckon him!"

VISION

"Where there is no vision, the people perish."—Proverbs xxix. 18.

VISION

THIS is one of the deep sayings of the book of Proverbs. A saying, that is, in which we may find, if we will, more than the writer intended to convey; like some poet's line, which, as we bend over it and brood, yields up to us more than he had meant to sing, or knew he was singing; which suggests to us beyond what it says, expresses for us beyond its contents; a form of words which sets us musing for ourselves, and is capable of holding the new thought it stirs.

From the evidently designed antithesis of the second clause of the verse, "He that keepeth the law, happy is he," we may suppose the writer's actual idea to have been that a people are the opposite of happy or blest—that a people "perish"—who have no divine commandment revealed to them, no constraining sense of duty within them, no impression of an ideal to be followed, of a law to be obeyed. That to live really, and not die, to live in wholesomeness and not decay and putrify, we must needs be seeing something to which we ought to be conformed, something transcending the attained, which ought to be reached after.

Or, his thought may have been that a people perish—tend to corrupt or decline—when there is no inspired seer among them, with his perception and conviction of invisible realities above the ordinary; uttering in their midst his loftier sentiments, his "counsels of perfection." As when the Hebrew psalmist lamented, "We see not our signs, we have no more any prophet"; or the historian of Samuel's childhood recorded "The word of the Lord was precious"—was scarce—"in those days; there was no open vision"; or another recorded, "Now for a long season Israel had been without a teaching priest, and without a law, and they were times in which there was peace neither to him who went out, nor to him who came in, but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the country."

Such, possibly, was our author's thought—that a people were in an evil case, were liable to fall away in moral tone and manners, to sink down to lower levels of moral feeling and behaviour, or, as the word rendered "perish" literally signifies, "to become loosened," relaxed, reckless, unless there were seers among them; not enlightened scientists or discerning philosophers, but men here and there, of exceptional spiritual sensibility and intuition, who saw secrets and bore burdens of the Lord, which the multitude saw and bore not; men here and there who dreamt dreams of beauty with which the minds

of the multitude were never visited, or cherished and enforced standards of excellence—conceptions of obligation—too high for them; men here and there, like lonely mountains rising from the plain, that catch upon their summits the gold of heaven's dawn, while the plain lies dark; whose slopes shine with a day of God, while the plain beneath them skulks in night.

It is true, at all events, that such solitary seers in a community are always saving or safeguarding influences, to whose presence and effluence we owe often more than we recognise or suspect—but for whom, with their "aeried sight amid our twilight dim," we should scarce be what we are, in health of soul or soundness of action; should be somewhat less ordered and more vagrant. We are kept alive by them, where without them we should be ready to die, are upheld by them in a measure of steadfastness, where without them we should slide.

They help silently, like salt, to preserve us from the corruptions to which we are prone; help, like breaths of wind from the heights, to freshen and renew our air, which else would be fouler or staler. The real saviours of society in every age are the few singularly devoted and noble, who, though unappreciated, disregarded, and misunderstood, and failing, perhaps, at all to transmute the surrounding mass, yet leave behind them ever, unfailingly, some lingering aroma of their quality,

some secret seeds of elevation and refinement, whereby, gradually, the race is uplifted and purged, receiving from them, now and again, something towards its progress,—and the times of most promise for the future, and most pregnant with hope, are not those in which there prevails a general goodness and virtue, of a moderate kind, or a general absence of vice; but rather, when in the midst of little-diffused excellence, or even wide-spread degeneracy and depravity, a few sublime, a few transcendently consecrated souls, are breathing and acting,—" the *mountains* bring peace to the people."

A people are poorly off, are suffering dangerous and deleterious privation, however orderly and cleanly, however well-conducted and well-disposed they may be, or however supplied with mere intellectual giants, with instructive scientists and illumining philosophers, who have not among them their seers, some of surpassing spiritual insight, affection, or enthusiasm, to whom the world of the invisible is more vivid and more real than to others; who stand beholding " the land that is very far off," and things that are not as though they were; who nurse in their breasts and proclaim to unlistening or unreceptive ears impossible ideals; who dream dreams of what might be, or should be, which, to the practical, the prosaic man, may seem absurd. These are an instreaming of the living among

the dead, an angelic troubling of the sluggish waters of common thought, or common morality, that leave them somewhat stirred and cleared.

We may have our scientists and philosophers, and be grateful for them, but we want such as these, we want our rapt saints and rare heroes, our small company of poets, mystics, visionaries, to complete their work, and without them should be weaker and coarser than we are; for while knowledge is power, as Amiel said, love is strength; we *become* men only by the intelligence, but we *are* men only by the heart, and they break in, from time to time, stimulatingly or preservatively, upon the heart. They serve to keep open and replenished within us the fountains of sentiment and emotion. You, sir, cannot attempt to realise an excessively lofty ideal in the shaping of your course, or the conduct of your business—you must do the best you can, sanding your sugar and adulterating your bread as moderately as possible. But the presence and effluence of those who harbour fondly the "excessively lofty ideal," and whose scattered voices are heard enjoining its pursuit, cause you to do a little better than you otherwise would, assist to lift and hold you a little above the level on which, but for them, you would be inclined to rest.

We may pronounce their ideas wildly impracticable, may look up at them sometimes with a half-pitying, half-scornful smile, as "rather

moonstruck creatures, you know," as mere idle dreamers, but all the while they steal into us wholesomely, subtly act on us to some saving or restraining effect; all the while we are being touched by them to something of finer or less carnal issue, as the people were touched of old by King Admetus' fabled shepherd, Apollo, of whom Russell Lowell has sung:—

"There came a youth upon the earth
Some thousand years ago;
Whose slender hands were nothing worth,
Whether to plough, or reap, or sow.

"Upon an empty tortoiseshell
He stretched some strings, and drew
Music that made men's bosoms swell
Fearless, or brimmed their eyes with dew.

"Men called him but a shiftless youth,
In whom no good they saw;
And yet, unwittingly, in truth
They made his careless words their law.

"They granted that his speech was wise,
But when a glance they caught
Of his slim grace, and woman's eyes,
They laughed, and called him good-for-naught.

"Yet after he was dead and gone,
And e'en his memory dim,
Earth seemed more sweet to live upon,
More full of love, because of him."

So, continually, the eccentric, unworldly souls, here and there in our midst, the serenely optimistic singers, singing their optimism in the face

of the darkest facts of life; the reckless counsellors of unattainable perfection; the too frequent dwellers afar off, in the realm of the ideal; the seers, peculiarly, of the things of the spirit, whom we glance at, and turn from, are disposed perhaps to ridicule, yet cannot help half admiring, do tell upon us somewhat upraisingly or chasteningly, without our knowing it—and not to have them with us would be loss.

But now, there are many senses in which it is true that vision is essential for us to healthfulness of life; in which it is true that to have no vision, as distinguished from what is learnt by thought and inquiry, by reasoning and intellectual processes—no vision at the same time of something invisible and undemonstrable—is to perish, to be left naked while possessing, withered while living. Without some vision, indeed, of the unseen—of one another's unproved but assumed honour and honesty and truth, for example—society could not hold together, nor commerce be carried on. Every day, in yonder city, important transactions are conducted, business enterprises started and pursued, in dependence upon the assumed integrity of others, an integrity and trustworthiness in which men are content to believe. Continually, in order to succeed or enjoy, in our decisions, our battlings, our friendships, we must e'en go by vision of the invisible, and not by knowledge. Again and again,

it is not by what we know or have experienced that we are sustained and guided, but by what we see, that appears not, and by what we see, perhaps, in contradiction to that which appears.

And who can be veritably himself, rounded and full-orbed—or receive the redeeming revival of tone which he often needs in depression, the freshening, self-restoring escape from himself which he often needs by the way—who is not finding some communion, between whiles, with what is unseen, who is not capable of turning aside from facts to bathe in fancies. Facts are not everything, are not sufficient to keep us interiorly sweet and strong; we want also, at intervals, the ministry of fancies, to lose ourselves in a region whither no striding feet can bear us, to catch glimpses of a "light that never was on sea or land." They are *not* whole, however they may abound, who are never visited with dreams. Of thought, of logic, of science, without vision, it may be truly said, "dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life." The man, however deficient in understanding and information with regard to the phenomenon, whose eyes are open to, and his heart touched by, something more in the crimson sunset than the sunset shows, is fed with nourishing meat, of which *he* knows nought who is but a "reasoning self-sufficing thing, an intellectual all-in-all." And who would not sooner be one with Wordsworth,

to whom the "meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears," than one with the Peter Bell of whom he sang that "a primrose by the river's brim, a yellow primrose was to him, and it was nothing more."

Do not neglect to cultivate and exercise for your sweetness, for your sanity, the sense latent in us all, which admits ever and anon to fields and pastures outside the actual. The mediæval ascetic, who thought out no subject, and could not keep himself properly clean, might be a monstrosity, but not the less so is the purely intellectual modern, without a vestige of idealism. A thrill of fancy may be sometimes more lucrative than the discovery of a great fact or the acquisition of a new idea.

In work, again, there must be vision to ensure the best doing, to elicit and sustain the best effort—vision of an ideal unrealised, unembodied, that beckons us with its beauty and claim, and has to be reached after; of something towards which we have to press and struggle, in conformity to which our work has to be shaped.

We must be seeing ever suspended above us, ever flying before us, a better than we have done, a possibility of an attainment not yet attained, feeling within ourselves the need of loyalty thereto in aim and endeavour, loyalty that raises and ennobles us with the upward look while bending to our toil. This is essential always to make us true, vigorous workmen in any department

of labour, the heartiest and the happiest—some vision of an alluring ideal. He who has it not, who enters upon and prosecutes his labour without it, will be meanly content with poorer performance, with no more application, no more industry than may be safely avoided; however ready and assiduous at first, will be sure to grow gradually slack and slovenly; sinking to the degradation of shirking or slurring when he can, of doing imperfectly, or leaving undone where he may venture without risk of harm to himself, to his standing or repute. For him, at least, there will be no joy, no delight in his task, no enduring interest to relieve the dullness of details, but the whole thing will be so much drudgery that *has* to be gone through. As a workman, he perishes. The workman is preserved in force and warmth, in brightest devotion, only as he sees the gleam and feels the attraction of an ideal.

Then, once more, they are not filled and enriched as they might be, who are without vision of the sacred in the common; of some *higher*, present always though hidden, in the low; some heavenly, latent in the earthly.

There are people who can find splendour, greatness, God, only in the extraordinary or the strange, never in the familiar or the ordinary. The thunderclap awes them, but not the silence of the still, small voice; the occasional flash from the tempest cloud, but not the daily light. They can discern easily enough the grandeur of noble

action on a lofty stage, in connection with lofty circumstance and state, but not so readily the grandeur of equally noble action on a lowly stage, or "in huts where poor men lie." The homely holds no glory for them, no beauty hides for them in the plain, no element of grace in the graceless among their fellows, no "soul of good in things evil." They do but perceive what is apparent, not the better which appears not. They are void of imagination, of any comforting or bedecking imagination, in looking upon the outward scene, and miss continually much that is most real through inability to behold aught but the actual.

Now, it is difficult often to see the Christ in the carpenter's son, or the bird of paradise folded in the egg of sober hue; to see the divine in unsightly and commonplace persons, or in our own narrow and humble sphere, in the daily round of petty duties and petty cares to which we are confined; and hence the weariness, the enervating melancholy and depression of many—"life is so dull," they whine, "so uninteresting, so sordid, and men for the most part so contemptible or so faulty."

The secret of it all lies in themselves. They have no vision of the invisible, and for lack of it live excluded from inheritances that might be theirs, for lack of it go naked and perish, as we all do and must unless we possess something of it, unless we are able to descry in people and in things something greater, something fairer than meets the eye, or can be proved; unless we have

the gift of idealising the actual or looking behind and beyond it.

We often hear and talk about the divinity of life; the divinity of life has become nowadays, in religious circles, rather a cant, but for that very reason, because it is a cant, it is in danger of practical denial. In proportion, however, as vision of its divinity is ours, vision of its divine, educational meaning and purpose, whatever the lot or circumstance; of a divine order within which all things move; of a divine element and promise in man at his meanest and worst; of an always finer than is, within and around us, waiting to be realised—in proportion as such vision is ours, we are saved from perishing, stand clothed with power to endure, with strength to aspire and do. And

"Each day the world is born anew
For him who takes it rightly;
Not fresher that which Adam knew,
Not sweeter that whose moonlit dew
Entranced Arcadia nightly.

"Rightly? That's simply; 'tis to see
Some substance casts those shadows
Which we call Life and History
That aimless seem to chase and flee,
Like wind-gleams over meadows.

"Simply? That's nobly; 'tis to know
That God may still be met with;
Nor groweth old, nor doth bestow
These senses fine, this brain aglow
To grovel and forget with."

THE BRIGHT AND THE DARK SIDE

"Praise the Lord from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children."—Psalm cxlviii. 7—12.

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."—Romans viii. 22.

THE BRIGHT AND THE DARK SIDE

VERY different and opposed these descriptions by the Israelitish poet and the New Testament Apostle of the mundane scene; of what they beheld, and how they were impressed in contemplating it. To the former it was all bright and gladsome, something rejoicing or ready to break into praise; all was fair to look upon, and seemed to call for singing; while the latter saw nothing but gloom and dolour, a world woe-begone and wailing. How was it that to the two men the same creation wore such differing aspects? Well, strangely diverse are the aspects it wears for us from time to time. There are times when it affects us much as it did the Psalmist, kindling pleasurable and grateful emotions; when, looking abroad, we say to ourselves, "How good, how delightful;" and then times, again, when it only saddens or depresses, and we say to ourselves, "Lachrymae rerum!"—the tears of things; the suffering, wide-spread and manifold, the "heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world." Nature, how she charmed us yesterday with her exquisite beauty and sweetness; the earth was the Lord's and the fulness thereof. To-day all is changed. How terrible, how cruel she is with her black thunder

murk, her smothering snow, or devastating storm. We sally out on some brilliant summer morning, and, taking our way through the green meadows, along flower-scented country lanes, past picturesque villages bathed in golden sunshine, it is as though everything that had breath were praising the Lord. We hear or read presently of gruesome disasters wrought by dire natural forces as if by

> "Some blind Cyclops
> Hurling stones of destiny,
> And working bootless ill,
> In mere vacuity of mind and will."

The newspaper brings to our breakfast table reports of a succession of tragical disasters on land and sea, and with shuddering soul we smile sardonically at the Psalmist's effusion and can only echo the exclamation of St. Paul—what a groaning creation, groaning and travailing in pain!

The aspect of things varies, moreover, with our varying selves.

> "Ours is their luminous vesture,
> Ours their shroud;"

they take on, continually, the hue and colour of our passing moods, of what we are in mental frame, and of our personal condition and circumstances; with these they are more or less tinctured. As the firmament to the globe, "*cœlum*" rounds itself to "*animum*." Are we happy in ourselves, happily settled and environed? All is blue, bluer, at least, than it can be to one in

misery or depression. A merry heart sees more for singing in any survey than a wretched or burdened one. On what is displayed before us our shadow falls to some tempering of it, with some qualifying effect. It was in no dark, scowling, winter time, we may be sure, nor in a time of private calamity and affliction, that the Psalmist wrote as he did, but, most probably, out in the fields and woods, on some fine, sunny day, some day of balm, or when he himself was happy in mind and lot, while the Apostle, we know, wrote his pronouncement under the oppression of great care and many trials, shut up in the pagan city of Corinth, witnessing daily its corruptions, brooding on its wickedness, and vexingly Satan-hindered, as he said, in his anxious desire to visit Rome. And they are our personal things which determine or influence largely our estimate of things in general, now raising and now lowering it, now rendering us somewhat pessimistic with regard to the mundane scene, and now brightening us to something of optimism.

Then, again, though there be much suffering in the world, enough and more than enough for lamentation, we are not seldom astray and mistaken, in particular instances, in our computation of it. It is greater, sometimes, in our idea than in reality, is less severe or less unmitigated with those who are bearing it, than it seems to us from where we stand, or according to the judgment of our

sensibility—our sensibility tends to exaggerate it. There are secret alleviations and halcyon moments between whiles which we, looking on from outside, do not discern. It is not all so entirely wretched with the long-afflicted, bed-ridden creature as, in our free movement and active life, we think it must be. He has learnt something of the peace of resignation; use and wont have softened in a measure and made gradually tolerable to him what we count wholly intolerable. And in rare hours of relief from pain, in the occasional visit of some cheerful and cheering friend, or the occasional brightening of his dim chamber with a gift of lovely flowers from somebody's garden, he tastes, perhaps, now and again, a keener joy than we can imagine, as keen as any that we taste in our happier condition. And it may be that one whose lot appears to us most bleak and drear is less to be pitied on the whole than another whose lot appears to us most enviable. You can never judge properly your fellow's grief. Griefs are like countries, each man has his own. Every heart knoweth its own bitterness and a stranger intermeddleth not with its joy, and there may be more of heartsease with a dinner of herbs eaten amid many hardships, than with some who sit clothed in purple and fine linen and faring sumptuously every day. The cupboard of some poor cottage, if comparatively bare, may hold a less grisly skeleton

than the cupboard of some neighbouring mansion hides.

As for the travail of creation or their own, they who are extremely plaintive over it, or gird at it, might be less given to bewail and readier to sing praises notwithstanding, did they but look more on the other side of the picture—in reflecting not only on the nights of weeping, but on the mornings of joy; not only on the amount of suffering, but on the amount of exemption; on the songs that do mix with all the groaning; on what is being experienced every day the world over of pleasurable emotion, of various gratification, or of placidity and ease; or on the measure of time, the spaces in one's life during which nothing is suffered, when the days come and go without a pang, when we breathe a tranquil air and walk at large, not radiant, indeed, but not aching at all. Those stretches of smooth road over which we pass almost unconsciously, giving scarce a thought to the smoothness, are not sufficiently taken into account. Remembered are the storms encountered and forgotten the calms between; remembered the weary seasons of pain and forgotten the lengthy intervals of painlessness.

And if any are inclined to cry out against or deprecate the existence of pain, that it should be found diffused and prevalent as it is in God's world, let them but consider the fact that upon it depends the existence of pleasure; that but for

something of the former, we could never know aught of the latter. Pleasure, not disturbed and broken in upon by pain, would gradually cease to be pleasure. We must needs drink the bitter draught of the one in order to taste the sweetness of the other; joy, enduring unchanged, would be joy lost; man sings, as he does, not only for all his sorrow, but because he is made subject to sorrow; his laughter is born of tears, and stale, flat and insipid would be the creation in which there was no groaning.

For myself, I am unable to conceive of any happy world, of any world worth living in, without it. No more travail—no more raptures or blisses or growths from more to more; however, in the dream of the seer of Patmos, his ideal city was a city from which it had vanished. We owe to it, at all events, whatever of advance has been made from lower to higher things, all our best gains and truest progress. It has been ever the stimulant to fine and brave actions that else would never have been performed; has provoked or conduced to most of our great and heroic deeds; out of it have come the compassion, the sympathy, the tenderness, the fortitude, the noble courage and patience with which the human scene is enriched and beautified. Out of it romance, the dreams of the ideal, and all greatest and deepest poetry. As Shelley said, "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." The Christ who has been

such a mediator of highest good was perfected for us by the things which He suffered, and but for sorrow earth would have been a poorer place, and man a creature of feebler fibre and meaner quality. So, however unable we may be to sing beneath it, while under its sting, we may well sing on reflection because of it—must not, certainly, be impatient of its existence and persistence; and to pray for its elimination from our midst would be about the blindest and worst prayer one could offer, a prayer which, answered, would involve great loss and impoverishment; would leave us as the foolishly-suing Israelites of the wilderness were left, of whom it is written that Heaven granted them their desire but sent therewith leanness into their souls.

It looks, moreover, as though some suffering were destined to be the abiding portion of humanity, whatever its course and development may be, whatever the evils, emancipation from which it may attain to in process of time; that—attain as we may in process of time through increasing knowledge, moral culture and social rectification to happier and happier state, with many or most of the sources of present misery extinguished and the dreamed-of millennium reached, the millennium of universal righteousness and peace—to something of suffering we shall still be exposed and doomed to experience, since, though wars should cease and distressful want and

penury come to an end, with all the affliction of sickness and disease, and the redemption of society be realised in the reign of a perfect beatific order, we should still be at the mercy of those forces of Nature, whose occasional desolating ravages could not, as now, be prevented or escaped; should still be liable, as now, to their occasional outbreaks, to the grief and anguish caused by blizzard and tornado, by earthquake and volcanic eruption. In the midst of all our quiet, Nature might at any moment make some trouble for us, agitating our still waters and rending with ruthless hand our green pastures. Only snow out of the north, falling softly for a week, would harry and put us to straits; while there would be, withal, every day, the tears of those who mourn for the dead.

No, the blessing-fraught manifestations of the sons of God, of which the Apostle dreamt, and for which, it seemed to him, the creation waited in order to its deliverance, would not free it from all its travail and pain. It will be always, we may expect—and expect with no shrinking or whining acquiescence—it will be always, come what may, pleasure *and* pain blended together, if in other proportions than now, at the roots and in the fibres of the great tree of human life.

But, says one, perhaps, it is not the fact of suffering which is the dark mystery to us and of which we complain. We can see with you, and

are ready to acknowledge, that it has served and is serving some good, useful purpose; that much of what we are and have of worth has accrued from it. It is the *amount* that weighs upon us, more, by a great deal, than is needed surely for the end, or than appears to be at all contributive to it, to be acting at all beneficently. Were there less among us, we might be able to accept it without murmuring, but there is over-much of it, it bulks too largely.

Would, however, any diminution of the amount or the severity suffice to reconcile us to it? Would it not still be repugnant to us though it were ever so reduced? Yes, as one has truly said, "Whatever the degree in which it presents itself it would always be the element that we disliked and wished away; it lies in the very nature of suffering that we do and must complain of it. None of us could be trusted with the modification of it for mankind, with the power of determining what its quantity or intensity should be, since to the least of it we must needs demur." That we feel it too much, as it is found existing, is no proof, therefore, that it exists in excess or superfluity, because, from its nature, it can never be felt to be other than too much; and how can we know that woes less painful, throes less sharp, tears less scalding, or distresses less extensive would have accomplished the purpose for which such evils are and abound? The "too much" of pain

and painful emotion could only be asserted by one who, after surveying with an all-seeing eye the whole of human life and of the cosmos, was able to pronounce confidently that a less measure of that which in the smallest measure is odious or unpalatable would have been equally compatible with all the advantages that are complicated with pain and painful emotion. To us it belongs only to bear bravely and patiently whatever of unavoidable suffering may be laid upon us, and so as to be reaping from it some fruit of wholesome beneficial discipline; to beware of creating, by our folly or ill-conduct, any needless suffering, whether for ourselves or others, refraining from actions or habits that would tend to beget it; to cultivate and grow in that mercy which, lying at the basis of human society, is called forth by the spectacle of human suffering and conduces to its lessening or relief; and to give the while what aid we may be able to give toward preventing sufferings that are preventible, and remedying such as are remediable, trusting the while, with a quiet and reasonable trust, in those hands unseen "which reach through darkness"—the darkness of the creation's travail and pain—"moulding men." And, when still somewhat burdened with what may seem to us the mystery of the continued travail and pain,

> "Falling, with our weight of cares,
> Upon the great world's altar stairs
> That slope, through darkness, up to God."

THE PROPHET'S FUNCTION

"Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth."

"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them."—Jer. i. 9, 17.

THE PROPHET'S FUNCTION

THIS describes the ancient Hebrew prophet in his conception with regard to himself and, more or less, in fact. He was a meek, submissive recipient from above, as he believed, of what he was bound to publish abroad; one irresistibly, helplessly impressed, to be expressed accordingly. A word was implanted in him, not his own, not self-sown, but put into him for utterance, which he had to put forth without abatement or reserve, and could not forbear. He was a speaker to whom silence was impossible, speaking under constraint that which had been given him to speak. The word within him he called a burden, since it weighed on and oppressed him until he was discharged of it, and "a burden of the Lord," since he had not taken it on him, but had it laid on him by a greater than himself. If he sang, it was as the linnets sing in spring, because they must; if he stormed or wailed, it was as the autumn wind which, roaring or sobbing, cannot stay. He was a man seized by and possessed with a message from which he could only be freed by telling it; this cry of woe or warning, of counsel or remembrance, the

unavoidable expression upon him of a mysterious inspiration.

But with the word lodged in his soul he was often, according to his confession, in some conflict for a while. It was not wholly welcome to him, was as a guest forced upon him whom he rather recoiled from entertaining. It came uninvited, and he would fain have been spared the coming; there was that in him which went against having it to hold and voice. It caused him dismay, was not to his liking, not for his peace. Could he have stifled and kept it back from his tongue, choosing instead some other word to which his feeling more inclined him, and which would have been spoken with less of difficulty or entailed less of trial for him, glad would he have been to be able to rid himself of it. He did not want to hear and say these things that sounded in his inward ear and pressed to be declared by him, and he strove for a time not to say or hear, but, struggle as he might, he was compelled. The Lord in him would have His way, do what he would; the in-breathing Spirit overmastered in the end all rebellion or reluctance in the flesh.

So it was, certainly, with Jeremiah, as he himself records in one or two pathetic passages of his book. "O God, thou hast enticed me, and I was enticed; thou art stronger than I and hast prevailed, though in consequence I meet

with derision daily and everyone mocketh me. I had said, I will not make mention of Him nor speak any more in His name, but His word was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I grew weary with resistance, and could not refrain." Something akin to which we ourselves have known, have we not—say, in a haunting, troublesome sense of duty, from which we have tried to escape; with which our love of ease or our wishes have fought, and happily fought in vain; to which at last we were obliged to yield; in a combat carried on within us between some nobler thought arising and lower impulse there, in the midst of which it rose opposingly; when conscience has intervened with its dictates and importunities against the passion of the moment; or the vision and felt call of an ideal, calling to be followed, has come to disquiet us in some path of dalliance, of selfish indulgence or worldly policy down which we were drifting? Yes, we too, though no prophets of the Lord, have had borne in upon us at times a word of the Lord which we were loth to accept and inclined to withstand; for surrender in obedience to which we had to fight with ourselves, happy if the fight ended at length in our being swayed and dominated by it.

And the word from above in the mouth of the prophet was again and again just the uttered conscience of the nation, voicing among them

the better, the worthier that they were and were not.

He who was spokesman for the Most High, announcing His will and commandment, was therein also the spokesmen of them, of their own best thought and heart, at variance with which, or below which, they were living. For, underneath all the worst iniquities or corruptions, all that prevailed of wantonness and vice, of spiritual deadness or formalism, there lurked or slumbered a national consciousness of duty, of righteousness, here and there in scattered instances, more or less awake and potent; and in inculcating what he inculcated of duty and righteousness he was the mouthpiece of these, presenting to them between whiles that which lurked or slumbered in them and was here or there approximately conformed to, or at least aspired after. The prophet in their midst, with his moral standard and demands, inculcated and expressed the moral conscience of the nation, which was more, as it always is, than the life and conduct of the nation. For it is not alive and ruling in all the members—in no more than a very few, perhaps. Hence the prophet, their spokesman, was often in conflict with the people, and they with him; was rejected or scorned, persecuted or defamed as, notably, Jeremiah was, whom they now reviled and now imprisoned and threatened with death, and he bitterly complains of the treatment he had received at their hands.

The Prophet's Function

It was not alive and ruling in the priests of the land, perfunctory officials, sunk in formalism, given up to ceremonialism, and they were mostly hostile to him. But there were those, a remnant, in whom it breathed or fluttered, with whom it strove to their striving to be and do in some harmony with it. And they heard this echoed in his ethics and ideals, saying: "Ah! these are our secret aims and desires; these represent what we are dreaming of and longing for, and would fain become." Such was the function and service of the prophets in Israel, and it was a high function, an important service, for it is good to have our conscience, so often overlaid or half smothered, voiced before us; to have held up before us that which we are in our highest moods and moments, yet in our ordinary hours ever fail to be; what we know and approve in our inmost mind, and do not; feel in our inmost heart and are not assimilated to; to hear now and again spoken aloud to our ear, perhaps in vivid, glowing words, the low, fluctuating whispers of our better self, the abiding possibilities of our nature, as distinct from our actualities of life and conduct. These possibilities we speak out to ourselves, not without some benefit accruing in our public worship and prayers. "Oh!" they say, "listen to your worship and prayers; are your days equal to and in accord with these? Are your lives lived on a level equal to them?"

Why no, of course not! In them we give utterance to our ideal, and to utter it—this is good, is somewhat elevating or chastening, though it be still and for ever an ideal unrealised and unapproached. But for uttering it thus at intervals, we might be less pure, or more faulty and low-toned than we are. It helps to check a little our tendency to sink or decline; to urge and lift a little beyond what otherwise we might be content to be.

Again, the Hebrew prophet with his speech was continually affirming, to a ritual-loving people, the supremacy of the moral. A wholesome force in their midst against the disposition to forget that, to attach undue importance to their system of rites and ordinances, and to plume themselves upon a strict and scrupulous observance of these, while neglecting the cultivation of virtue. He was a healthy antidote to the sacerdotalism of the nation, to the priestly order and the priestly influence, with his constant exposures and rebukes of what was wrong or defective in conduct; with his constant keen criticism of life, and denunciation of ill-doing, whether in the palace or in the street, and his lofty conceptions of the morality which Jehovah demanded.

While the people were always tending to lose sight of the symbolic significance and teaching of their ceremonial law, and to rest in the symbols

as though they were all — losing sight, for instance, in attention to the prescribed washings and lustrations, of the clean living and the purity which they were meant to symbolise as required of them; losing sight in attention to the appointed offerings of slain beasts upon the altar, of the self-consecration to right-doing which they were meant to image and keep before their mind as the one thing required of them—the prophets were always recalling this to them and strenuously insisting upon it. They were the perpetual seers and the vehement declarers for the nation of what was veiled in the mere symbols to which the nation was prone to confine itself; the seers and declarers of the moral obligations and the moral law, beside which all ritual forms and practices were worthless, except as they might serve to promote the fulfilment of that. And when, instead of serving for that, they seemed to have, rather, a contrary or hindering influence, the prophets were found often decrying them in violent terms, pouring upon them scorn and contempt. As when Isaiah exclaimed:—"Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth; they are an offence to me; I am weary to bear them. Bring no more vain oblations; wash ye, and make ye clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes."

Or Jeremiah, again, in deriding the multitude of their burnt offerings and sacrifices, went

actually so far on one occasion as to asseverate that the Lord, when He brought forth their fathers from Egypt, had given them no commandment at all concerning burnt-offerings and sacrifices, but only the commandment that in order to be His people they should obey His voice and do His will.

Yes, in their fine zeal for righteousness, for conduct, against the ritualism which neglected it, they could be at times almost shockingly irreverent towards ancient sacred institutions; almost too unqualified, perhaps, in condemning or disparaging; as reforming enthusiasts often are and cannot help themselves. But a noble work was theirs in Israel—the work of asserting through the generations the supremacy of the moral, and the vanity of religious observances, apart from rectitude and purity of life. What nobler word, indeed, was ever uttered by any teacher of any age than the word of Micah? "Not thousands of rams or ten thousands of rivers of oil doth the Lord require of thee, but simply to do justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God."

And while insisting upon the transcendence of the moral over all, it was to failure or to deviation in regard to it that the prophets of the Hebrew commonwealth were wont to trace all that befell the country, of misfortune or calamity, of whatever went wrong with them or came upon them

of evil; that, according to their repeated declaration, was the root and secret; that such and such things happened to them was due, fundamentally, in their judgment, to what they were in themselves, to the way in which they had conducted themselves with respect to divine laws. Was it some strange reverse or great adversity suffered, some deplorable disaster or sore troubling of their peace, some ruinous invasion of the enemy—Assyrian or Babylonian—they were eating therein the fruit of their doings, enduring therein the resilience of their sins. This was the constant teaching of the prophets, as though they had said "in encountering what you have encountered of evil, you are but meeting yourselves; whatever may come, from whatever quarter or by whatever means, it comes radically from yourselves; you have determined it. Is your land being scourged by ravaging armies of the aliens, your own vices have woven and knotted the scourge!" Thus they probed always below the surface to find the why of what occurred, and taught, in fact, that the cause, let the occasion be what it might, was character; that while this or that might be the occasion, character was the cause. Than which nothing is more true. For is it not ever from our heart that the outward world takes its form and aspect, our quality that shapes the circumstance or makes it what it is to us? As when to-day the circumstance that

sours or tempts me, to which I owe my miserable distemper, or my slip from virtue, has all its power to sour or tempt from myself, from what I am and have been. And whether in the case of individuals or of nations, of all which the years may bring them, along these or those channels, through these or those processes, the ultimate source and determining influence is character.

"What is saving for a people?" wrote Matthew Arnold once. "Our institutions, says an American. The British Constitution, says an Englishman. The civilising mission of France, says a Frenchman. But Plato and the sages, when asked what is saving for a people, answered, 'to love righteousness, and be convinced of the unprofitableness of iniquity.'"

And Jeremiah and the prophets, when asked the same question, answered to the same effect, that what is saying is to order our conversation aright; to cease from evil and learn to do well; to delight in the law of the Eternal, and make our study in it all the day long.

But, once more, the prophets to whom came the word of the Lord that set them preaching reform and made them zealous for it, were, in a certain respect, strict conservatives, enjoining and urging continued adherence to the old ways. There were, it may be said, in Israel among the chosen and peculiar people, two opposite dispositions; a disposition on the one hand to break

through their isolation and mix with the world, to associate freely with foreign nations; and a disposition, on the other hand, to maintain severely their separateness, to shun all alliance or intercourse with the heathen—and the voice of the prophets was invariably raised in advocacy of the latter course. While the former was mostly the policy of the kings and the court party, the policy they pursued and expressed was seclusion, the importance and necessity of holding aloof from the surrounding peoples lest by intermingling with them they should be drawn from their allegiance to the Lord Jehovah. Hence they seemed often, to many, narrow and illiberal, were sometimes denounced as anti-national, as opposed to the prosperity and the best interests of the commonwealth.

Jeremiah was thrown into prison as a traitor to his country. But however their patriotism might be called in question at times on account of the line they took, it was really patriotism, according to their lights, which moved and constrained them to take it. To them, any relaxation of the usual seclusion was fraught with danger—danger to the moral and spiritual well-being of Israel—and was likely to lead to their gradual absorption into heathenism, with the consequent loss from the earth of that grand monotheistic religion which distinguished them, and of which they were the guardians. They

were branded unpatriotic, as in other countries other earnest souls have been, because of certain unpopular political sentiments cherished and expressed by them, who, in cherishing and expressing these, were sincerely patriotic, and whose scouted sentiments may have been, after all, wiser and sounder than the multitude who branded them. And the Hebrew prophets, narrow and illiberal as they might appear, in the influence which they exerted always preserving the separateness of their nation, were helping, without knowing it, to preserve alive in that little corner of the earth the monotheistic faith, the idea and worship of the one God, for a great end, —until, with the final breaking up of the nation, it should go forth abroad to become a diffused spiritual power in the world.

Anyhow, to the word put into their mouth they were bravely faithful, girding up their loins to speak it, undismayed by hostile or frowning faces. They listened to and trusted the serious voice within—the inward light—and spoke accordingly, whether it concurred with, or ran counter to, public opinion. In plain terms, they were loyal and obedient to their own felt inspiration, to their own individual thought and vision, which is to be always a servant of the Lord, and of some sure, true service in the world, whether one is a prophet or not. And this is what is required of each of us, as much as it was required of old of

those men in the midst of Israel—to be each, in this sense, *himself*, and not kept, not deterred from being it by any extraneous influence, by contempt or servility; allowing any sincere conviction or impression of his to have its way with him, though it should carry him along lonely or strange ways; allowing nothing to stay or hinder him from following the gleam in his private soul. But such gleams are not seldom quenched, to our own detriment and to the world's loss, for lack of the resolution or the courage to follow them.

There is in many, often, a fruitful spirit from on high, a word divine, which they profanely refuse or neglect to entertain, too afraid or too reluctant to let it command and direct them. The tide rises in them, and they will not be drawn forth upon it; the wind blows from the hills and they will not be lifted or swept by it. Alas, for the secret breathings of the Holy Ghost that have fruitlessly died away, instead of moving to fine issues, as they might have moved! Alas, for those who, unlike the prophets of ancient story, while inspired now and again, are inspired in vain!

NAHUM AND JONAH

"The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite."—Nahum i. 1.

"Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh."—Jonah i. 1.

NAHUM AND JONAH

I COUPLE together Nahum and Jonah, as being two prophets who were concerned, not at all with their own country, its condition and prospects, but entirely with a foreign people, and in both cases with the same city of Nineveh.

Whether any word of the Lord came to them with reference to their own country we cannot tell; nothing is recorded of them but their sayings and doings in relation to the Ninevites, except indeed a passing allusion in the book of Kings to a prediction of Jonah's which was fulfilled in a large recovery of lost territory for Israel by Jeroboam II. And Nahum's deliverance need not detain us long; apart from the vigour and the wonderful music of the diction it has little interest, is noticeable only for the fierceness of its exultation over the downfall and ruin of an enemy. With respect to himself, he is but a name, a name with no date attached; while his prophecy deals exclusively with the downfall and ruin of Nineveh, over which it utters shout upon shout of delight, and which many suppose him to have been foretelling some hundred years prior to the event, soon after the withdrawal of Sennacherib

from his invasion of Judæa in the reign of Hezekiah, finding mention of this withdrawal in the words "there is one gone forth out of thee that imagined evil against the Lord and plotted iniquity," and suggesting that the sentence " I will make thy grave, for thou art vile, and no more of thy name shall be sown " may refer to the subsequent death of Sennacherib by assassination when worshipping in the house of his God.

But the greater probability is that the prophet is hailing in the later reign of Josiah what seemed to him to presage the approaching destruction of the haughty and oppressive mistress of the world, viz, the besieging of Nineveh by the armies of the Medes and Babylonians. He has heard the welcome news, and believes with joy that her destruction is at hand, that they whom she had harried and ravaged need fear her no longer. " Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace. O Judah, celebrate thy feasts for the wicked one will never again pass through thee, she is to be utterly cut off. He that shattereth is come up before her face, and however she may keep the munition and watch the gate, and gird her strong loins and fortify her mighty power," it will be all to no purpose. " Woe to the bloody city, home of falsehood and rapine, the Lord is about to demolish her for

the wide havoc and misery she has wrought." And he stands imagining the scene away yonder, and gloating over it; the furious attack with flash of steel and thunder of battering-ram, the frantic futile struggle to defend the walls, the breaking through and swarming in of the victorious assailants, the noise of the prancing horses and rattling chariots in the streets, the last vain attempt at resistance, the panic, the rout, the conflagration of the royal palaces, the moaning of the terrified maidens, the multitude of the slain, the piles of corpses—until, picturing to himself a mass of charred and smoking ruin as all that remained of the once proud city, he cries exultingly "Where is the lair of the lions and the feeding-place of the young lions? where walked the Lion and the Lioness and the Lion's whelp and none made them afraid?" It is a majestic pæan from a literary point of view—majestic in imagery and description, unsurpassed by anything to be found among the effusions of the Hebrew seers.

You see the progress and incidents of the siege, the conflict and the carnage, as you read. And this pæan—sung by an obscure Jew, gazing out with flaming eyes towards where the metropolis of Assyria stood meeting the onset of her foes—has lived on through the ages, and rolls its music on our ears to-day; while the mighty metropolis and the great dominion of which she was the centre rose in splendour to sink in night. So immortal,

often, amidst the dissolutions and extinctions effected by time, are a few eloquent words—floating upon the waves beneath which thrones and empires disappear. A thousand things of large bulk and high prominence come and go, civilisations fade and perish, and still some word of genius calmly survives.

But terrible is the bitterness, ugly and barbarous the spirit, of Nahum's rhythmic shout; a shout of savage joy at what he deemed the deadly peril and the impending doom of Israel's enemies, without a single note of pity in it. He is a ravening wolf, smelling from afar the blood of the encompassed capital and sending forth a yell of satisfaction. There is no faintest touch of concern for the suffering of the victims; he revels in the thought of them, in the thought of the horrors which his fancy paints. "She is empty and void and waste; and the heart melteth and the knees smite together, and much pain is in the loins, and every face gathers blackness, and her young children are dashed in pieces; they cast lots for her honourable men, and her chief men are bound in chains, the fire devours her; all that hear the bruit of thee clap their hands over thee."

His fervid patriotism renders him cruel, as fervid patriotism has often done, destroying or hindering the sense of the brotherhood of humanity and begetting enmity or harshness toward other nations. Yet he may admit some

excuse for his feelings on hearing of Nineveh's danger and probable downcasting; they are scarcely to be wondered at, when we remember what his people had endured, and still had reason to dread from the ruthless Assyrian power, how it still menaced their peace and prosperity. Now that they were recovering from former exhausting conflicts with it, and were beginning under Josiah to gain strength again and extend themselves, the prospect of its subversion must needs have given them unspeakable relief; it would be as though an overhanging shadow were about to clear off and disperse, leaving them to breathe more freely. And the prophet hated the Assyrian on purely public grounds, not as being offensive to himself personally, but as the past desolator of his country, and constantly inimical to its interests.

Moreover, we should not estimate the fierceness of his breast by the fierceness of his language, for when a furious passion vents itself in poetry, as his did, the inward fury is considerably qualified or abated; the poetry in which it finds vent carries off something of it, and the man is left a good deal less violent than his song. Only put your fiery wrath, or your infinite sadness either, into song, and you have thereby mitigated it; they are the dumb souls in which bitter scorn or hate keeps all its bitterness; he who has *sung* his scorn or hate does not burn against men

within half so intensely as he sang. The Hebrew prophets who so savagely cursed the heathen nations in poetic words were, we may be sure, nothing like so savage in heart as their curses.

But enough about Nahum the Elkoshite and his scream of exultation over a tottering foe. Long before him, more than a century earlier, another prophet lived whose name is intimately associated with Nineveh. Jonah, the son of Amittai, belonged to the days of Jeroboam II., one of the most powerful and successful of the kings of Israel, by whose sword she was delivered from the hands of the Syrians, and all the possessions she had lost under his predecessors were regained, as Jonah, we are told, had predicted would be the case, which is all that is said of him in the historical books. The prophecy ascribed to him has not been preserved, and in the book bearing his name we have no recorded discourse of his to *men*, only a record of his converse with Jehovah—first in the form of a hymn of thanksgiving for escape from a watery grave, offered, not as our version seems to convey, while imprisoned in the deep, but when he had been drawn out; and secondly in the form of a twofold complaint, complaint at the sparing of the city whose destruction he had foretold, and at the subsequent blasting of the green shelter that had protected him.

It is curious, by the way, to note the contrast between his pious reverence and awe in the one instance and his easy familiarity and freely expressed displeasure in the other; how he, who now addressed the Lord with the utmost humility and with worshipping gratitude, as his mighty deliverer, to whom all his obedience and worship were due, is presently remonstrating with Him on His proceedings, and sharply refusing to be mollified by His gentle rejoinder, crying, "Did I not say beforehand how it would be? and I do well to be angry with Thee." It reminds me of certain rude devotees of whom I have read, who, when dissatisfied with the result of their prayers, will sometimes turn upon the imaged divinities to whom they have been kneeling, and roundly scold and even beat them.

Is it not much in the same way, however, that some among civilised moderns often treat their God, warmly devout toward Him while His providences content them, but when these become perplexing and painful, inwardly railing at, or cold and restrained toward Him?

But now, concerning this book of Jonah, with the contents of which you are acquainted, how are we to take it? Was it written by himself or another as a veracious account of what really happened to him in connection with a divine errand with which he had been charged to the Ninevites? Anyhow, we cannot take it thus.

Whether or not he was divinely summoned to preach to them, and ultimately went, we cannot believe, of course, that he spent three days and three nights before obeying the summons at the bottom of the sea, preserved in the stomach of a fish, any more than we can believe in his reported conversation afterwards with the Almighty, when they are represented as talking together on the hillside. Yet he may—though no hint of it is found in the historical book, where he is mentioned as a famous prophet of the time—he may have felt himself divinely called to go and prophesy against the Ninevites, may have resisted the feeling, and faithlessly turned aside from the indicated path until, through some terrible experience, he was at last constrained to follow it; and then, his prediction not being verified, may have displayed for a while much ill-temper and chagrin, the tradition of all which some scribe of after days may have embodied in the pictorial and fantastic form which we have here, leaving us to disengage as we may be able the underlying modicum of fact. Or else the book may be an allegorical story, in which, with the historic son of Amittai chosen for the hero, the writer sought to shadow forth certain ideas that filled his mind. That it belonged to a much later age than that of the hero is more than probable, I should say, from the feeling about the heathen which runs through it, and seems, indeed,

to be the central point and motive of the whole; the feeling that they were not to be despised or considered necessarily vile, that Jehovah cared for them also, and was ready to show them mercy whenever they showed penitence for evil done, and that it was wrong to scorn or hate them and desire their affliction. This was only a later feeling which gradually arose and prevailed among a few—among the best and worthiest of the nation. We find manifestations of it especially after the Babylonian captivity; then the virtues of the heathen began to be recognised as they had not been, and the possibility of their ultimate reception into the kingdom of God. When Ezra, in his fanatical zeal for the complete separation of the Lord's people, issued his barbarous order that all those who had married foreign wives should put them away, although the majority feebly consented, many hung back, some of whom were influenced, not by personal attachment merely, or considerations of interest and policy, but by a sense of the cruel injustice of the order, by a new impatience of the long cherished national bigotry and exclusiveness and new and more charitable sentiments towards the hitherto contemned and stigmatised aliens. And my impression is that the book of Jonah was written about this period, to express and encourage these sentiments; that its main gist and purpose is to image forth in a story the idea

that the heathen were not without their good qualities, nor outside the pale of Jehovah's mercy; that they, too, were capable of receiving His word, and that He was seeking to give it to them, and would not have the worst of them recklessly condemned or lightly flouted.

And we can imagine one thing which, in addition to the chastening, broadening effect of Israel's long dispersion abroad, would have contributed doubtless to engender and nourish this idea. You know how, as time goes on, and knowledge grows or circumstances change, we meet now and again with what seems to contravene religious beliefs and conceptions of ours, with facts that disturb and perplex us in regard to them, and we are obliged to reconsider them, to see whether they can be reconciled at all with such facts, or whether we must renounce them. We search for a way out of the difficulty, and, searching, may possibly discover now and again that it is caused by some mistaken view or false assumption, which we have been blindly harbouring in connection with these beliefs and conceptions, and which only needs to be eliminated to leave us still in unshaken possession of them. Well, the ancient Hebrews must have had a similar experience; they came in time to be religiously disturbed and perplexed by apparently contradictory facts, by facts which appeared to invalidate the Divine inspiration of

their trusted prophets, and to declare that what they had always deemed words of the Lord on their lips, had not really been words of the Lord. For how many threatenings of theirs against the nations had remained unfulfilled. Had they not often foretold judgments upon them that had never fallen? Here, for example, was Babylon, that wicked and cruel city, spared by the Persian conqueror, and still proudly erect with splendour undimmed, though they had foretold its destruction. Could it be that the Lord had not spoken by them after all? That the seers in whom they believed were no true oracles of His?

What were they to think? Ah! wait; was it not that they had been in error all the time in their thoughts about the heathen? Was it not that the latter were no less capable of obtaining pardon from on high than themselves? That their Jehovah could be patient and long suffering with them also, and willing to extend His mercy to them when they repented? Yes, this surely was the explanation; if woes pronounced by their prophets upon the surrounding nations had, in certain cases, not come to pass, it was not that the prophets were false dreamers, but that, contrary to their own false persuasion, hitherto indulged, even the heathen were susceptible of purifying contrition, and Jehovah was ready ever to have compassion on them.

So we can imagine that many in Israel learnt to solve the problem which must have presented itself, and more or less exercised their minds, rising happily thereby out of their old tribal hate into healthier and more generous sentiments. A beautiful deliverance, a beautiful gain, reached through the pressure upon them of bewildering religious difficulty. And the book of Jonah was the offspring, I suggest, of these better sentiments, and was meant to utter and inculcate them. You can see them pervading it from the beginning to the end. It opens with the extreme humanity and considerateness of a company of heathen sailors, shown in their persistent reluctance to save themselves by sacrificing the Hebrew stranger; they could not do it, though he begged them, and would not until all other means had been tried in vain; over against which is the picture of a Hebrew prophet playing an unworthy and contemptible part, and followed relentlessly by the wrath of the Lord. Then there is the readiness of these mariners to be impressed by the name and power of Jehovah, and to bow down to Him in worship with burnt offerings and vows, and, over against this, the shame and humiliation of one of His own people, and the miserable living death to which he is doomed for a while, with the waters of the great deep encompassing him and the weeds wrapped about his head, simply because he had been

unwilling to carry a divine warning to the heathen.

Then we have the swift melting of those hardened Ninevites beneath the preaching of the Jew, their prompt acceptance of his message and immediate repentance, the king with all his nobles and subjects at once humbled before the Lord. Then, the confession of the prophet that he had always felt the uselessness of predicting woe to the heathen when it was laid on him to do so, from the conviction that if only they repented, as it was likely enough they would, Jehovah was too gracious and merciful to carry out the threat He had commanded to be uttered. Then comes finally, the condemnation of the prophet's hard-heartedness towards the Ninevites, and mortification at their acquittal, the Lord himself being introduced as rebuking him and pathetically pleading their cause. "Should I not have pity on that great city wherein are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left, and also much cattle?"

And there, abruptly, the book closes; a book plain and poor in style compared with Nahum, with none of the rich imagery and impassioned eloquence distinguishing the latter, but in *spirit*, according to my view of its motive and meaning, infinitely superior. Nahum, with his splendid diction and poetic genius, breathes throughout a

savage and bloodthirsty spirit, but here, with less rhetoric and poetry, a gentler, nobler spirit breathes. There is to me, indeed, no more interesting and attractive book in the whole Old Testament collection, representing, as I conceive it does, the dying down in many Hebrew breasts of the age-long national scorn and hate, the age-long bitter bigotry and exclusiveness, and the growth of juster conceptions, wider sympathies and humaner feelings.

You may find, of course, in its pages various moral lessons and suggestions, such as the danger of seeking to evade duty, the sure Divine judgment which faithlessness draws after it, the mighty influence which a single earnest man may exert wherever placed, the cruelty of which wounded vanity is capable, and the false zeal for truth which is nothing but ardour and fondness for our own opinions, and is ready to anathematise unsparingly all who differ from them. Such lessons and suggestions are to be found in the book, but it is a story, it seems to me, composed expressly in protest against the Jewish contempt for the heathen, the grand points of which are the possible worth and grace in aliens who had been considered utterly vile, and the universality of God's love and mercy.

Behind this strange oriental story I descry a divinely instructed and courageous soul, rising above the violent, narrow prejudices in which he

had been nurtured to discern and feel more truly, losing his poor tribal deity in the vision of a great Father of mankind, and aiming, in the best way he could, to win his countrymen to similar breadth of thought and catholicity of spirit; and, passing thus through the letter to the spirit, the book of Jonah stands for me in no mean place among ancient inspired Scriptures.

CRUCIFIED AND LIVING

"I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live."—Galatians ii. 20.

CRUCIFIED AND LIVING

THIS was St. Paul's song of deliverance, happy deliverance obtained from a former life of his; the old life of dreary, weary subjection to Jewish legalism, to the law of commandments contained in ordinances, of bondage to the yoke of a ceremonial system which kept him always anxious lest he should fail in some particular outward observance, always careful and striving to conform strictly to certain outward rules because an ancient and venerable code imposed them; when he had sought and thought to be justified in the sight of heaven by punctilious obedience to these, zealous only to be found blameless with regard to them. From all which he had been released, to all which he had died, Christ had emancipated him, bringing him into the blessed freedom of quite another and ampler life, a life of inspiring faith and love in which he was constrained to do, not as before by injunctions or regulations from without, but by the motion and impulse of a spirit within. His song of deliverance has often since been sung when under some redeeming, liberating influence men have escaped from long-worn shackles of superstition to understand and think

more rationally, from narrow to wider views, or from low aims and aspirations that had contented them to throb with higher; when, looking back to the life and scope of their previous ranging, to what they were a while ago in ideas crude or confined, they have thanked God heartily for what they have come to be of more and better; for mean, marshy faults surmounted, for fetters dropped. How they have rejoiced in the change that has been wrought for them—change of sentiment, of belief or of mental horizon—in the broad place of field and pasture to which they had been led from their house of bondage; in the breezy hill gained at length above the dusky vale where their feet at one time stumbled. Ah! it is good to be conscious of having had our eyes opened by whatever means—whether by some book read or some person encountered—opened to discern more truly, to be conscious of having learnt somehow a more excellent way of living, or of having attained to breathe free where we had been bound.

But St. Paul's words in the text may be taken and used in another sense than he intended—are suggestive, at least, of other thoughts than his when he speaks of being crucified and yet alive, meaning simply that, having died completely in respect of his old self, he was yet living abundantly in respect of a new self that had been born within him. The term employed by him to

represent such death, namely crucifixion, calls up at once ideas of pain, distress, suffering. We think of one impaled, afflicted, tormented, and then, how many are the instances in which the victim of sorrow, calamity or adversity might say of himself—has often said—"I am crucified, nevertheless I live." As when the same Apostle wrote, "We are pressed upon every side, but not straitened; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." Living, too, in the sense of experiencing some fine glow amidst all the shivering, some thrills of pleasure and delight amidst all the throes; for there are crucified souls not a few who yet are by no means strangers to joy, nor even to moments of transport and rapture; who, though bleeding with wounds, can smile and sing, or still know what it is to feel that life is sweet and earth fair. There are those not a few who, while stretched upon the cross of evil and cruel circumstances, and only pitied by spectators for their misery, are not so entirely forlorn and desolate as they seem, nor void of happiness. Angels visit them between whiles in their great and terrible wilderness; wells of limpid water are theirs in the droughty desert; no little light shines for them through the thick murk and darkness. Bearing heavily and bitterly, they rise somehow above what is borne, and find it on the whole good to live; find, indeed, much to

luxuriate in by the way, much to charm or satisfy. Under the storm that rends them certain verities, perhaps, are present with them, certain beliefs possess them, which suffice to support and solace plentifully, and afford them a sanctuary of peace, if not of bliss. Like the poor Methodist tradesman, who, followed by disaster on disaster ending in a succession of severe bereavements, with the death, first of a beloved wife, and then of an only son, a lad of rare promise, gathered his few friends together and asked them to join with him in singing Cowper's well-known hymn :—

"God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform ;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.
* * * * *
Blind unbelief is sure to err,
And scan His work in vain.
God is His own interpreter,
And He will make it plain."

That simple faith of his, by reason of which the blow that bent failed to break, was it not blessedness—blessedness in the midst of woe ? Might he not have said with the Apostle, "I am crucified, nevertheless I live" ?

And continually, indeed, creed or no creed, men do live bravely and brightly in spite of a tempest of suffering. Far from their giving way, or becoming crushed to dull despair, and wishing

themselves "anywhere, anywhere out of the world," there are mitigations in their worst estate, there are occasional delicious or pleasant happenings, there are intervals of some relief which are positive joy, that serve to reconcile them to the burden of existence, and, drinking of some brook by the way, they lift up the head. The bed-ridden in his pain, after a long night of weariness, beholds the morning sun at the window, and his eyes are lightened, or is intensely happy for an hour, happier than we guess, with the bunch of spring flowers which a friend has left in his dim room. They who suffer most are rarely without ripples of pleasure—spurts of rejoicing that help them to keep holding on and bearing up. Though ever so crucified they still live with some fulness of pulse, some panting of heart.

But while St. Paul wrote, "I am crucified, and nevertheless," notwithstanding, "I live"—may we not say also more and other than that, as, indeed, he too would have said, namely, I am crucified and *therefore* live. For is it not life, various, rich life which suffering has really brought us, and often brings, which, but for it, we should never nor could ever have had? What else has again and again opened our eyes to see, to see enrichingly as we had not seen, or our ears to hear delicate notes in nature and in man that were otherwise inaudible? What else has revealed to men their strength, strength in

them which they had not known, and put them in possession of it—has blessed them with new deftness for ministry, new power of sympathy, or gladdened them with unexpected displays of sympathy, with disclosures of grace and worth in others? What else has gone to stimulate action, invention, enterprise; has filled the world with examples of noble fortitude, patience, courage, heroism, or has taught many a poet to sing so inspiringly as he does, many a prophet to speak as he does, movingly to our heart? Expel all sorrow from our midst, and where would be more than half our virtues, more than half of what we deem the beauty and glory of men? It is like the interjected alloy in Browning's poem, that went to the making of his Roman artificer's golden ring, by the mixing of which, tempering the mass, it became the thing it was.

> "The rondure brave, the lilied loveliness
> Prime nature with an added artistry."

Why are we a little wiser, stronger, mellower, or more alive or sensitive than we were to the "still, sad music of humanity" but that we have known suffering? Or what is there of affection, of gracious and tender sentiment in a family, that has not been formed and nurtured to a great extent by suffering there, by the call, now and again, of pain for help, of distress for sympathy. Pain and distress entering a house have con-

tributed in hundreds of instances to soften and refine and elevate.

"One house in our village I can name," says a writer, "where the husband is mostly rough and boisterous, and the wife somewhat sharp and shrewish. A favourite daughter has been long confined to her room with severe illness, and there is one chamber at least, in that dwelling, where the voice of anger is never heard, where the words take always a gentle and often a lofty tone. The wife drops her acrid criticisms as she steps inside it, and for the rough boisterous husband, I have known him after a day's hard labour tramp a mile or two out of his way in the teeth of the cold March rain and wind, only to gather and bring home the first violet or first primrose to cheer the imprisoned invalid."

So from their couch of pain is it given frequently to invalids to be the means of chastening and refining the vigorous in their somewhat hard or coarse robustness, and the suffering of some goes to promote something of fuller life for the many; with their stripes these are healed. It would be a poor world, so far as we can see, a poor world compared with ours, on which no storms of trouble broke, in which no griefs were endured, or hot tears shed. Is it not to what we ourselves have tasted of bitterness, or borne in some form of the cross, that we can trace much of the growth which we have made, some of the

best lessons learnt, the best grain reaped? And are there not men, have we not known men, notable for their ripe mellow wisdom, their breadth of charity, their serenity of temper, clothed in the white garments of acquired noble character or fine sensibility, concerning whom, were the question asked, "Who are these and whence come they"? the answer would be that of the elder to St. John on Patmos: "These are they which came out of great tribulation"?

But there are crucifixions, by the way, self-inflicted, of which shall we not own that as we have subjected ourselves to them we have lived—lived in a fulness and blessedness, an inward strength, elevation and enlargement that would not else have been ours? Instead of yielding softly to inclination, or following freely and pleasantly certain impulses that we felt, we have put ourselves to the pain of resisting them and rejecting them, and have gone, with a sharp struggle, against the grain, against the passion or desire of the moment. Ah! it was pain, but a pain which left us with a peace and satisfaction of its own, augmented and empowered. Life flowed from it, a new sense of worth and dignity, a new and deeper content. We were so much the more and the mightier for our temporary impalement upon that cross of self-refusal. And who lives, indeed, who lives always as he *would*—when he might if he chose—

and not, now and again, as he would *not*—though he could if he liked—who does not consent at times to pause and withstand himself. To gain and inherit oneself one must e'en often sacrifice or thwart oneself. Yes, his development is to be realised alone through self-repression, or, as Jesus said, "He who would find his life let him be willing to lose it." Not self-indulgence, whatever its immediate pleasure and profit, or however innocent, but the Via Dolorosa of some self-renunciation for a good object, for truth and duty; that is the path of life leading to increase of being and heights of power.

But, "I am crucified," wrote St. Paul, "with Christ." If he suffered much, as he did, he suffered it all with Him, in fellowship and unison with Him. Now the crucifixion of suffering is universal and inevitable, is imposed more or less in some form or other upon all; none can escape it, such is the nature and constitution of things. Why, we need not stay to enquire, for the enquiry is useless and vain, enough that so it is. The lamb slain? The lamb has been slain from the beginning of time, and through all time is being continually slain. Gethsemane and Calvary? Gethsemane and Calvary are only a picture of the world, and are always with us in everlasting repetition, recurring every day on every side. The Cross? The Cross is everywhere, in some exemplification, or some image

and similitude of it. The whole creation may be said to bear it, or to bear marks and signs of it. As one has said, the ground has to be wounded by spade and plough and put as it were to torture under harrows before it will produce corn for us; the ripened corn must be crushed between mill-stones, ground and re-ground, before it will make bread for us; nor is the bread committed to the stomach for our nourishment until the teeth have torn and mangled it. There would be no wine for us unless the grapes had first been pressed and trodden. Vegetable life is sacrificed, and animal life slain for us; things are secreted within chaff or skin or shell, and in order to reach the hidden good, chaff and skin and shell have to suffer violence. Nature will grow us thorns or thistles without labour or culture, but if we would have from her wheat-fields and gardens and vine-yards, she must be chastised that we may get them. Every creature comes into the world through the gate of sorrow, and only, we may add, in the sweat of his brow does man eat his bread; only at the cost of toil and pain is knowledge acquired and progress made; only with some bloodshed are any reforms or redemptions among us achieved; while upon us all alike in the family and in the social state is laid the Cross, often sore and heavy, of some vicarious endurance. Members one of another, again and again are we wrung in some way,

whether we will or no, because others are wrung; must need have our path roughened, our lot embittered because of what others are doing or have done. Their iniquities, their follies, their sicknesses precipitate for us something of trouble or ill.

Suffering? It is ever lying in wait for and breaking in upon us, comes to us through and from our whole nature, comes to us also through and from our contacts and intercourses, and cannot be averted or evaded. Most truly wrote Thomas à Kempis when he wrote "Go where you may, seek what you may, the Cross surely meets you. Arrange all things according to your mind and pleasure, yet are you certain to find something which you must needs suffer, willing or unwilling." Then, if it be so, if we are bound to be crucified here or there, at one time or another, let us all study and determine to be crucified with Christ, in unison and fellowship with Him, to take our cross, whatever it may be, in His spirit, in the spirit of filial resignation and surrender, in the spirit which says: "This stands and comes to me within a divine order under which all is good that seems most ill, this is to be accepted and borne as my wise and beneficent discipline, wiser and more beneficent than I know;" which says—not sternly, grimly, with the Stoic, "This is a would-be, unavoidable enemy, against whom I will set my face like a flint, and will not allow him to crush

or discomfort me "—but rather, smilingly, "This is a would-be friend, who shall be entertained to serve me." Here is the receipt for extracting from suffering its sting, and rendering it not only innocuous but wholesome. Here the secret of suffering to one's advantage and joy. It all depends upon how you take it, whether in this temper or that, with these thoughts and feelings about it or those. There is nothing evil but thinking makes it so; as we think of it so it becomes to us. Take the rough things of life roughly, with inward animosity or acerb impatience, with chafe under and girding at them, and they batter and bruise you. Take them smoothly, in an amiable and amicable way, with the calm of the philosophic mind, with quiet trust in their underlying benignity, their dumbly offered sweet use, and they part with much of their roughness and treat you kindly, as when in our dealing with men a "soft answer turneth away wrath." All things encountered give back to us, like the echoing hills, ourselves—our own cry at the encounter. According to our greeting they respond with music, or harsh sound. Must you certainly be crucified now or hereafter, to-day or to-morrow? Only be crucified *with Christ*, thereby to live and reign.

THE VALLEY OF BACA

"Who passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools."—Psalm lxxxiv, 6.

THE VALLEY OF BACA[1]

GOD'S chosen are always chosen with a view to something beyond their own inheritance; and when I am sharply and severely tried, it is not merely for my own discipline, but for the effect upon the world through me. This is the way to look at it. We are sent down, now and again, into valleys of weeping, in order that we may make them "wells," in order that we may yield thus, with the working of the darkness upon us, and with the spirit and manner of our endurance, a fountain of sweet water in aid of the weak and fainting around us. The grand question is, not whether we are the better, but whether any besides us are the better for our having suffered.

You have had your share of calamities and griefs, have known what it is to be harassed and distressed; has any strength or assistance flowed therefrom into the lives of men? Has your experience of pain left in you for their benefit an added tenderness and depth of sympathy, or have they been offered help by your example of courage and patience? Alas! it is not only unprofitable but unfortunate for others that some

[1] Preached on Palm Sunday.

people have borne crosses. Their crosses drop curses rather than blessings. How sour and short-tempered these have made them, how enervating and depressing in their influence, how calculated to stir up evil passion, to disturb faith in God and in human nature, to lower and deprave the tone of those who come within their range! Men had better get and keep out of their way. Fiery serpents, instead of fountains, are the product of their wilderness. But there are some for whose painful crosses thanks might well be given—so fruitful have they been in good use for others. How exquisitely gentle and gracious and wise-hearted sorrow has rendered them; how full of understanding and fellow-feeling; how healing and refreshing their company; what a calming, cleansing atmosphere they seem to give off; and in many a soul what earnest thoughts and high aspirations has the spectacle of their brave endurance kindled! And there could be nothing, surely, more sanctifying in the hour of trial, or more stimulating to noble behaviour under it, than to remind oneself again and again, and to cherish the reflection—"Now the Lord is seeking thus to minister to men through me. This is the meaning of the blow; I have to receive from it so as to stream with the Water of Life; I have to bear it so as to inspire and edify them that pass by."

And what can be a greater compensation for

pain than to have it so fulfilled? We need not grieve for those weepers whose tears make springs in the desert. They are rather to be envied for their grieving, however bitter it may be. Says one who sang divinely, while his brow was bound with thorns:—

> "I found an Angel of the night;
> The voice was low, the look was bright;
> He looked upon my crown and smiled.
> He reached the glory of a hand
> That seemed to touch it into leaf;
> The voice was not the voice of grief."

But there is One who stands supreme and unique in the rich power of blessing He has become through sorrow, and we can hardly think of wells made by travellers in valleys of Baca without thinking of that valley of dimness and anguish into which He went down on that Sunday of His last visit to Jerusalem; even the valley of the shadow of the Cross; or of the fountain of grace and benediction which He made of it. "Daughters of Jerusalem," He said to the women who followed Him, bewailing and lamenting, "weep not for me." No, the terribly burdened, sorely afflicted Son of Man was not to be wept over compassionately as He toiled through His vale of misery, and it is not for us, certainly, to go mourning at the remembrance of it to-day, for was He not accomplishing there His joy, "the joy set before Him," in the plenitude of help and

healing which He knew would break forth from thence; and has He not been more than repaid for all its woe in the abundant help and healing of which it has proved, and is still, the source? The story of His sufferings may smite me with shame and abasement for the evil of the world and of human nature that contributed to them, but I have no groan of pity for the sufferer. I keep not His Passion Week with sighs of sentiment on account of the pangs that tore Him. Nay, I am moved rather to celebrate it with an offering to Him of songs of congratulation. Happy Christ, I think, whose heavy Cross was destined to become so great a power of salvation, who bled to such real enrichment of men; if only my distresses and agonies might be found in their measure as conducive to the succour of others as His have been and are! What a well of living water did He make of those days of soul-parching sorrow, from the descent of Olivet to the ascent of Calvary! What thousands upon thousands have resorted again and again to this gloomy Baca of His, to be comforted and composed, nerved and kindled, to draw with joy from the wells of salvation! Only collect and listen to the precious words that fell from His lips as He dragged Himself along. Then it was that some of His choicest, tenderest, grandest utterances were delivered, utterances with which countless souls have nourished, solaced and

fortified themselves during eighteen centuries, in which from year to year, and from day to day, the Church finds never-failing sources of strength and consolation, stores of comfort and instruction. Alas! for the words which grief and trouble have sometimes wrung from men—harmful, wounding words, that have left stings in the breast of one and another who heard. Yet it is out of the depths of grief and trouble that some of the sweetest, wisest, helpfullest words have been spoken. Oh, the penetrating sermons which these have often produced, the happy and beautiful thoughts, the noble poems, immortal in their pathos and power.

> "Weep not over poet's wrongs,
> Mourn not his mischances;
> Sorrow is the birth of song,
> And of gentle fancies."

It is so, often; but how much poorer the world would have been without the words which Christ learnt to speak in the midst of His strong crying and tears; and the nearer He approached the climax of His trial, the richer became the fruit of His tongue, until at length, over the Passover meal, and on the road to Gethsemane, He seems to surpass Himself, transcend Himself.

The Passion Week gushes with speech that is Spirit and Life indeed. And apart from the things He said and the bearing He displayed under the shadow of the Cross—what a power of

blessing He was and is through His sorrows. It was through them that Joseph of Arimathæa, a disciple in secret, was drawn to avow himself openly, overcoming the fear of the world and of his order; that the indifferent Roman soldier was softened and awed; and the dying bandit melted into penitence and trembled with spiritual anxiety; and that many who had assembled to scoff were constrained to depart smiting their breasts with conpunction and shame. It was when they had seen Him sink down crushed, but nobly patient beneath their blows, that the people began to see their error, and, under a strong revulsion of feeling, were pricked to the heart. He would never have prevailed as He did at length to draw men to Himself, to excite emotions of reverence and worship and love, to stir to new and higher aspirations, had He never suffered and been crucified. That He might enter thus into His glory, the glory of quickening dead consciences and raising dead souls to life, it behoved Him thus to endure.

Yet again, how many of the sweetest and grandest lives have derived their inspiration and their sustenance confessedly from His Cross; how many has it helped to bear calmly disappointment, loss, failure, desertion and obloquy, and the pangs of unrequited affection. How many have learnt from it to find in sorrow a sacredness and a grace that they had not found before, and

to welcome it to dwell with them. Happy Lord Jesus! What must be His joy unspeakable as He looks down upon the well of water which His valley of Baca has become. Drink ye all of it, all ye that pass by, and nourish within you a virile and noble manhood. Commune with the sorrowing Christ, and learn thence to believe and trust in the Father, to enter into the spirit of self-giving charity, to be burdened with the miseries and disorders of society, to commit your way tranquilly amidst misrepresentation or frustration to One who judges righteously. It is better than watching with the American poet "the red planet Mars," in gazing on which he professed to find himself grow "serene and resolute and still, and calm and self-possessed." So may you know not only "how sublime a thing it is to suffer and be strong," but how truly to approximate to the sublime thing, and thus to make of each dim vale of weeping in your own life a well for the revival and refreshing of others.

ON RECEIVING COMFORT

" Should I receive comfort in these ? "—Isa. lvii.

ON RECEIVING COMFORT

It is a question which men have often asked themselves in allowing this and that to give them some comfort under the burden and heat of the day, to afford them some inward cheer or relief amidst outward gloom or bleakness, half doubting whether they were justified in consenting to be cheered or relieved by it, to accept and entertain as solace what it offered for solace, or whether they were not consenting to be cheated in taking it thus, seduced to find soothe or repose the while in a fools' paradise, in castles of the air, in hopes that were groundless, or in empty and delusive dreams. Is there now, they say sometimes, any solid substance in what we have been leaning on for rest or refuge; any real mitigation of the trouble, the severity, in what we have been harbouring as some mitigation? Or is it but a beguiling drug at which we have snatched, and which, instead of continuing to sip, we should rather hasten to reject, as Jesus on the Cross refused the medicated sponge, "the slumberous potion bland," which they held to His lips? Better anyhow, and wiser, to bear all the fierce pain, unsoftened, unassuaged, to face the bitter facts with unaverted and undiverted eye, than betake oneself to shelters built without

foundations, or cling to false comfort. Better remain unconsoled when life is difficult and distressful, or the prospect dark, than console oneself with pretty feignings or phantasmagoria.

But there are those who might well put to themselves the question of the text, and do not; by whom comfort is being found where it should not be sought, in things too poor and mean, is being drawn from low sources and unworthy, to which they should have been above resorting, from what, in comforting, more or less depraves or distempers, which leaves them the worse for it, as the dram-drinker for the dram which temporarily enlivens or gives temporary oblivion of his ills and woes. The indulgence to which they turn and which serves for some transient balm precipitates upon and within them something of poison. They creep for sanctuary, as it were, into holes and corners from which, if obtaining the desired sanctuary there, they emerge stained and defiled, with some contracted smirch adhering to them. It has been their luxury or their anodyne to indulge thus, in such pastimes and diversions, or to admit to and nurse in the mind such thoughts or imaginations, and sad is the price paid in the sinister effect upon them in some lowering and coarsening of tone, or weakening of moral fibre. They are accustomed, perhaps, to comfort themselves a good deal with the praise of men, with glowing

appreciations of them, with encomiums bestowed upon their work and achievement, until their original simplicity is gradually corrupted, an unwholesome and diseased self-consciousness induced, with growths of affectation and vanity, and some impairment of the whole nature, while they become stung by adverse criticism, incapable of sober self-judgment, and hungry and thirsty for praise, fevered with the lust of it, scarcely able to do without it, disappointed or depressed when it comes not. So their comfort goes to create for them proportionate discomfort, which is the case, often, with comforts courted and cultivated; that they expose us to suffering, to little mortifications and vexations from which otherwise we should be free; as with some semi-invalids who, intent on guarding their peace, and multiplying provisions and appliances for securing it, grow, as one has said, so morbidly sensitive that they increase a hundred-fold the causes of discontent and annoyance, instead of diminishing them. Loud sounds, bright lights, abrupt movements disturb them; shutting themselves up carefully in stillness and darkness, the light of day, with human murmurs or the ordinary domestic stirs, becomes their torment. Throw open the shutters in the closed chambers where they lie relaxed, and the common sun, the air, the skies, instead of opening paradise, are to them as the opening of Hades.

It is somewhat thus, often, with men's chosen and cherished comforts, that these with which they surround themselves lay up in store for them, or render them liable to, more discomfort. With these lost or intermitted by cross circumstance, they are made miserable for having made them their comforts. Beware of the comforts which are sure to or likely to bring in their train some inward mischief or *malaise* for you. Beware of those which, however sweet, are enjoyed only to some self-debilitation or self-slackening. A true, genuine comfort, as intimated in the etymology of the word, is something which tends to fortify, to string and brace, rather than to enervate. The answer to the question, "Should I receive comfort in these?" lies in another question to be answered. Will they contribute at all to my strengthening, whether in soul or body? Shall I be left the firmer for them in texture, any more animated or vigorous?

Refrain also from seeking or scheming for them; open your doors to admit them as they may visit you, but do not quit the house in quest of them; however they may be overtaken by pursuit, they are apt to prove then a little disappointing, and come, indeed, at their best and most freely to those who are not eager or anxious to catch them, while he who seeks them is oftener than he suspects like the absent-minded man hunting for the hat which is all the time on

his head, or in his hand; for again and again are they already his, close beside and with him, would he but recognise and accept them.

But, "comfort ye, comfort ye, my people," said the voice from heaven to the Hebrew prophet, and, God knows, it is just what we need often to have done for us, or to do for ourselves. We are failing sometimes, are not what we might be, nor working the more excellent work that we might, for lack of it; for lack of it our vision is dim, our hand feeble, duty is harder to perform, or temptations are yielded to as otherwise they would not be; it is sometimes the best thing you can give to a man, the best for his spiritual succour or advantage, toward his soul-rightening or salvation—will leave him seeing, perhaps, where he had but eyes before, or able to walk erect where before he had limped and stumbled. There are times with us when we want it—whatever our circumstances may be, however comparatively satisfactory or smooth, even amidst some gratifying achievement or success, with tasks happily accomplished, coveted ends gained, or a quiet haven reached from troubled seas—something still of thought or mental impression for deeper peace, yet another pillow for the easy bed. There are times of survey—survey of the scene around us, of heart burdening and oppression beneath "the heavy and the weary weight of all the unintelligible world," or of musing pause at

the finish of one stage ere another is begun; of self-overhauling, of reflection upon ourselves and our course, when we want it—that, perchance, more than anything else—something on which to retire for inward solace or refreshing, of which we can say, "However things are and have been, at their worst, there is this and this for soothe, this and this to recall with supreme content, or linger over with something of a singing heart."

And wherewithal shall we be thus comforted? What may we find, sitting here to-day? For myself if I may be allowed to speak for myself, and therewith, doubtless, for you also—there are certain days that have been, many or few, among all the gray or cloudy days, halcyon days in between the stormy, days of delightful, delicious experience that came and went like glistening birds of Paradise, their wings covered with silver and their feathers with yellow gold, the memory of which is a joy for ever, and nothing but a joy, for which alone it is enough to have lived through the chequered years, to have lived and suffered much. There is what from time to time one has seen and feasted on of exquisite beauty, the remembrance of which outlives the gloom and pain of many ugly or dreary things encountered, and more than compensates for the endurance of these; enchanting beauty, vanished but not lost, nor ever to be lost while breath remains.

And among the men we have known, "the beloved, the true-hearted, who speak with us on earth no more," the big, noble or saintly souls, intercourse with whom was as manna from heaven, and something of whose effect still lives in us; rare folk, who have charmed us by the way, and commonplace folk, who have surprised us now and again with their unexpected gift and grace. The increased reverence for human nature which the years have taught us, during which we have found such goodness in all sorts and conditions of men, such occasional sparks of the Divine in seeming clods. Oh! it is something for happy hoarding that we have learnt how good people are for the most part, if not in expression, yet in feeling, if not on the surface, yet down underneath, as glimpses are caught of what they hide in the depths of them.

Then, again, shall I not receive comfort in this, that, whatever I may not have been which I should have been, however poorly and imperfectly I have done, I have seen and felt the attraction of high ideals—of high ideals disturbing content, and drawing me to follow after them; that these, though often rebuking my life's low levels and not always faithfully pursued, have filled me with some yearning and allured me to some effort, have been cherished in my heart, though unapproached by my infirm and stumbling

feet. Yes, I may be and am, in relation to them, as one

> "whose footsteps halt,
> Toiling in immeasurable sand,
> And o'er a weary, sultry land,
> Far beneath a blazing vault,
> Sown in a wrinkle of the monstrous hill
> The city sparkles like a grain of salt,"

yet the distant city has captured and holds my eyes, and, slipping, slipping in the hindering sand, I plod on with undying desire, towards it. In reflecting on the little we have wrought and the little to which we have attained, let us take to ourselves, if we may, the comfort of the consciousness that, at least, we have greatly aspired and aimed, and are the more and better in all our failure for having thus vainly aspired and aimed; while, still, "through all our paltry stir and strife, glows down the wished ideal, and longing moulds in clay"—what, as yet, life has been unable to "carve in the marble real."

But oh! the smallness of it all, we think sometimes, of good work done or realised by endeavour. What does it amount to after all? What is the worth of it to the world or in the midst of the vast universe whose vastness seems to mock it, before whose vastness it dwindles and shrinks to nothing? Yet, look you, every bit of spiritual good done or realised has magnitude, whatever its insignificance in bulk or show. The humblest

duty faithfully discharged, the earnest purpose of a lowly breast, the secret high intent or wistful struggle to be, the heroic devotion or endurance on some lowly stage, in some obscure corner, fidelity to principle there in a trifling matter, the untold triumph by some cottage hearth of love over selfishness, the holier impulse quickened by some word or influence of ours in another's soul—these things are not measurable in terms of quantity, but of quality, and in quality are always grand, in quality immortal; apparently ending in themselves, they do not thus end, but survive in their eternal beauty, and in some contribution from them to the world, however imperceptible and untraceable. How unimportant it seems, that which goes on within the walls of this small building from Sunday to Sunday, where, for a few years, a handful of people, who awhile ago were not and in a few years will be no more, are assembling! But if any of us here, from Sunday to Sunday are receiving some fresh impression of Divine realities, some fresh stirrings to duty, some fresh nourishing of our higher nature; if any of us are kindled once and again to some purifying emotion, some spirit-uplifting and stimulating thought, or are strengthened by psalm and prayer and good words to be stronger for life and well-doing, it is not unimportant but of infinite moment and use. Something is ministered and experienced

here of imperishable value, and when we all are fallen asleep and gathered to our fathers, and "by no lips our names are spoken, and no heart beats to keep our memory green," this little church, with its hours of religious thought and meditation will leave, somehow, "its own enduring token, nor earth be quite as though it ne'er had been." With this thought and faith I comfort myself when ready to say, at times, "To what great purpose or for what service has it all been?"

Once more, in surveying the surrounding scene, and depressed, perhaps, by its discouraging aspect, by the many ugly features exhibited, amidst all the rampant evil and corruption of the time and threatenings of evil to come, let it be our comfort to believe and know that the present is better than the past, and will be excelled by the future. For the world has moved from lower to higher things, with whatever of occasional reactions or of confusions or disorders contracted in the movement, if in some respects it may have lost by the way what it would have been good to keep, and has become involved in murk and clouds that were not—it *has* advanced, and down beneath our feet lie to-day what were the hills of our forefathers. Look back, not merely through the generations to some previous century, but through the centuries away to the beginning, when labouring Nature had succeeded in pro-

ducing primitive man, and the human had appeared upon the stage, and from thence, what an onward and upward movement it has been. How the thoughts of men have widened and are still widening "with the process of the suns"! How the psychical life in humanity has grown towards increasing dominance and is still growing from more to more. In the creature whom Nature evolved at length in the midst of the creation, a creature endowed distinctively with the new capacity of improveableness, enormous changes have taken place in the way of progress, changes so great that, as one has said, "the interval between the lowest and the highest man far surpasses quantitatively the interval between the lowest men and the highest apes." Hence we may look confidently for his yet further progress. The power that brought him forth and has ever since been at work in him will not cease to operate to-morrow or to-morrow, or be content to leave him where he is, but will still go on fashioning him to finer and finer issues, and, as his present transcends his past, his future will transcend his present. It must be so, until, by whatever tedious and devious ways, with whatever of temporary haltings or retrogressions, accompanied with blood and fire and vapour of smoke, the day of his fulfilment is reached, and a beatific and splendid day that will be. Ah, the future, the future!

"O Land of Quiet! to thy shore the surf
Of the perturbed Present rolls and sleeps;
Our storms breathe soft as June upon thy turf,
And lure out blossoms.

"To thee the Prophet cries when hearts are coldest,
And gazing o'er the midnight's bleak abyss
Sees the drowsed soul awaken at thy kiss
And stretch its happy arms, and leap up disenchanted.
What promises hast thou for Poet's eyes,
Aweary of the turmoil and the wrong!
To all their hopes what overjoyed replies!
What undreamed ecstasies for blissful song!
Thy happy plains no war-trump's brawling clangour
Disturbs, and fools the poor to hate the poor;
The humble glares not on the high with anger;
Love leaves no grudge at less, no greed for more;
In vain strives Self the godlike sense to smother;
From the Soul's deeps
It throbs and leaps;
The noble, 'neath foul rags, beholds his long-lost brother."

But the future. Will our faith in it ever be vindicated by the event? Will the picture we paint of it ever be realised in fact? Or are we but indulging, as some would say, fond, empty fancies? No, I reply, in the name of God, no! For if I, His creature, in my longing for the perfect, am able to imagine thus, it seems to me that He can never be meaning less or poorer; seems to me impossible that I, in my longing for the perfect, should be capable of imagining a destiny for man and the world lovelier or grander than His purpose who has endowed me with the

power to imagine. His purpose may well surpass what the best in me leads me to imagine and hope, but below that, surely, it cannot fall. So, heart of mine,

> "Though we should miss the pearl and gold,
> And Heaven prove other than we deem,
> Doubt not the future shall unfold
> To something better than our dream."

Its unfolding, to whatever of beauty and glory, it will not be ours to see, but, living and labouring the while in happy assurance of it, let it be said of us, when we have passed from hence, in the terms of the Apostolic epitaph upon the Hebrew patriarchs: "These died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them."

Anyhow, of the poets' or prophets' most radiant vision of what shall be hereafter, I will never say, with those who answer "Ah! it is too good to be true," but will rather say to myself in serene confidence, it is too good *not* to be true.

THE UNTROUBLED HEART

"Let not your hearts be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so I would have told you; I go to prepare a place for you."—John xiv. 1, 2.

THE UNTROUBLED HEART

THERE is one chapter in the biography of distinguished persons—in the biography of a great genius, an eminent saint or seer—which has for us generally special interest, into which we are often most curious to dip—the chapter entitled "Closing Days"; curious to learn how he bore himself, or what fell from his lips, during those days, in the shadow of the approaching end; to see something of the thoughts which then occupied his mind, or to hear something of his latest words. What of his behaviour, his expression, we ask, in his latest hours? The favourite pursuit—was its influence upon him then exemplified? The ruling passion—was it strong with him in death? Geoffrey Chaucer died making a ballad; Waller, reciting verses from his beloved Virgil; Haller, the famous physician, fingering his pulse and murmuring, when he found it almost gone, "Yes, the artery ceases to beat"; John Keats, whispering low in reply to a friend who enquired how he felt, "Better, better. I feel the daisies growing over me." "Let me hear once more" sighed Mozart, "those notes, so long my solace and delight." Rousseau, when dying,

bade his attendants place him before the open window, that he might take a final look at his garden, and bid adieu to Nature.

Now, in the fourth of the New Testament Gospels, much is related of the intimate converse of Jesus with His Apostles during his closing days—of what, at least, the author of the gospel imagined Him to have said, while walking with them, knowing in Himself that around Him the night, in ever-nearing circle, was weaving her spell. Thus and thus the Evangelist depicts Him speaking on the eve of His departure from the world; and the depicted utterances might well have been His; whether His or not they truly express or image Him, representing His mental attitude, breathing His thought, His faith, His spirit.

In this fourteenth chapter, for instance, it is the very Christ who is portrayed though He may not be literally reported. Even such was the beating of His heart and the vision of His soul. Here He is, we may say, in His habitual considerateness and sympathy, in the quick, tender considerateness and sympathy that characterised Him through all His course, from the moment when, at the beginning of His ministry, He was filled with compassion for the multitude because they were scattered and dispersed as sheep without a shepherd, to the moment when, in the night of His betrayal, he pleaded, "If ye seek me, take

me, but let these go their way." "Be not troubled in your hearts"—that was Jesus all over. His own burden at the time was sore to bear; a burden incommunicable, of inward conflict, of trepidation and dread, of baffled yearnings, which He had to carry alone, without the alleviation of being able to confide it to any who would understand and partially share it with Him, with none beside Him on whom to lean it for some temporary lightening of its weight. But His little group of devoted followers, who, with all their devotion were incapable of entering into or entertaining it, were painfully agitated and harassed the while; tormented with the fear of something impending that would shatter their fondly cherished dreams; plunged in a gulf of dismal apprehension and bewildering perplexity, since, with the Master's late strange talk of doom and death awaiting Him it seemed to them that the Kingdom of their hope, on which they had been counting, was not to be realised after all, that what they held most dear was falling from them and vanishing. And, heavy as was His own secret trial, He was not so wrapped and absorbed in it as to be indifferent to or unobservant of theirs. He saw, amidst all that oppressed Him, their anxiety and alarm—poor, ignorant souls!—and had room for it in His large heart; it drew Him forth from Himself in self-forgetting essay to relieve and soothe. If

they could not be touched with the feeling of the private load He bore, *He* could be touched with the feeling of the load in their breasts, and must e'en hasten with effort to assuage it, to lift them above it to something of calmer frame—"Do not you be troubled." And not with "empty chaff well-meant for grain," or some commonplace of condolence, but with fit words in season, He sought to heal or allay the trouble, to the last a brother born for adversity, one always keenly sensitive, whatever engrossed Him, to others' pains or needs, and who knew how to flow with ready and timely solace; in whom any sorrow or affliction beside Him met, unfailingly, some succouring answer; to whose sympathetic understanding His followers' inward disquietude and despondency never dumbly appealed in vain, who, coming to Him with these, found ever what Sir Francis Bacon called "that particular fruit of real friendship which is the easing and discharge of the heart's fulness and swelling induced by various passions or emotions. We know," he added, "diseases of stoppings and suffocations are the most dangerous to the body; and it is not otherwise in the mind. You may take sarza to open the liver, steel to open the spleen, flour of sulphur for the lungs, castorum for the brain. But no receipt openeth the heart but a true Friend; to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels and whatsoever lieth on the

heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession."

Again, is it not Jesus Himself whom we have here expressed or indicated when, in beginning to comfort the dejected, despairing disciples, He is made to say, "Ye believe in God, believe also in Me?" Jesus Himself, in His serene confidence and assurance that whatever might betide Him of good or ill, of success or frustration, the cause for which He laboured and upon which He was poured out was God's cause, trust in Whom should sustain under all darkest clouds and discomposing events—and trust in Him, as God's organ and instrument; that, as He is reported once to have affirmed to the shocking of some who heard Him, He and the Father were one, meaning that the message which He delivered was not of His own coining and conceiving, but given to Him of the Father; that what He taught of truth and righteousness was of the Father's inbreathing; that the Kingdom which He desired and strove to establish on the earth was no mere dream or ideal of His brooding soul, but the divine idea and purpose, for the furtherance of which He was fashioned and used, and that hence, however seemingly visionary or however long delayed, it must needs be, sooner or later, fulfilled; that though He should shortly perish out of the land of the living, a disappointed and defeated worker, He would rise and survive

in its progress, slow but sure, toward ultimate consummation. Such was His quiet conviction, the conviction in which He toiled through the days, and went down to the grave. "That which I speak I speak not from myself, but from the speaking within me of the greater than I Whose word stands fast however my voice may sink to silence, and will endure for ever." "Since ye believe in God, believe also in me, for He it is Who is moving on His way in and through me." And here lay the secret of His strength and His elevation above all fume and fret of self. Nor are there any who, with their ministerings, have wrought greatly in the souls of men, who have not felt something of the same conviction that they were God-possessed and controlled, that in uttering what they uttered they were uttering not their own but very God's truth, or in working what they worked were working, not their own, but the work of God.

Then, in offering to His followers what might serve to relieve their depression and raise their downcast spirit, He is reported to have declared parenthetically "if it were not so I would have told you," as though He had said "Do not suppose for a moment that in my pity for your sadness, and my desire to disperse it, I would tell you aught that was not to me entirely true, of the reality of which I was not convinced. Nothing would induce me to brighten and cheer you, to

make you happier than you are, with what, to me, were false and unfounded statements; to cheat you out of distress into peace with what to me were chimerical hopes or fallacious dreams. I would rather leave you in your distress than try to soothe you with pleasant illusions, would never for your comfort deceive you but rather would allow you to remain all uncomforted. Were there no such consolatory facts as I am presenting to you, but only really darker and uglier; no such charming prospect as I am describing, but only really a clouded and lowering horizon, I would have honestly told you, and left you to bear it as you might." And was not *that* Jesus? The truth before all, to whatever of trouble or pain; no escaping from hard endurance, no sparing of oneself or others, no gaining of ease or solace at the expense of it, or by averting the eyes from it, by taking refuge from its sternness in a fools' paradise of dreams, or preventing clear vision of it with lulling drugs and opiates. Buy the truth, however heavy the pain of it; keep it at whatever cost, and sell it not for any price. Be you true to your convictions, to your own thoughts, let the consequences be what they may. When you must needs speak, say out the thing that is true to you, though the fruit of it be harsh and bitter, nor ever otherwise for mere peace or comfort's sake. *That* was Jesus! "If it were not so"—not so bright and beautiful as I

have depicted to you in your dejection to deliver you from it, but in reality far other—"I would have told you." I would fain console you if it might be with words of mine, but not unless, to me, the truth were so.

And what, according to the Evangelist, was that vision and persuasion of His which He indicated to His disciples with a view to their calming and enlivenment? "In my Father's house are many mansions"—or, more literally, "many abiding-places"—"and I go to prepare a place for you." That he was in the Father's house here on earth, to His feeling, His words often implied; He was never alone, however solitary or deserted; the Father was with Him. Not only with Him in the private recesses of His soul, but round about Him in the world of men and human relations, and in all the phenomena and processes of nature on which He looked, not with cold admiration or curious enquiry, but seeing in them ever, with tender reverence, His manifested presence and operation, or His signs and symbols of spiritual truth for the reading—round about Him in the fields, whether green or golden, which He loved well, in the lilies of the valley that whispered to Him as He bent over them sacred lessons of the Lord; in the winds that played with His hair, in the sunbeams that warmed His brow, in the landscape that spread at His feet. Unlike the modern poet who sings:—

"Strange the world about me lies,
Never yet familiar grown;
Still disturbs me with surprise,
Haunts me as a face half-known,"

unlike him, He, of all men, felt at home in nature, beholding in it, ever, His Father's house. But larger, wider than the visible round, the earthly scene, was this house to Him, extending unseen beyond its boundaries, with other abiding-places in waiting for the children who disappeared from here. Going from hence, He would go to the Father, to be living still somewhere beneath His roof; departing out of the world, would yet be abiding, not merely in what He had taught and wrought during the days of His mortal term, in some surviving effect of His life and action under these skies in sundry hearts left behind the better for His presence—but He Himself, in conscious being, knowing, loving, doing, as before, in immortal continuity. "I shall not be gone from the Father's house when I quit the world, but shall have somewhere else my dwelling and my vocation within it."

And, for myself, if I may not be quite sure, I am ready to believe with Him, at least am constrained to trust and assume, since I cannot think that the sense of freedom and identity which gives us our only sanction for goodness, truth and worth, is no more than an illusion, as it would be were we destroyed at death in

the destruction of the body. Nor can I conceive, while no particle of matter perishes, however it may be changed, that the spiritual elements, the personal spirit developed in us as a last crowning product of a long evolution, is destined to be extinguished with our corporeal dissolution; that the Power which with such age-long labour and pains evolved at length this subtle, exquisite essence, this prime, supreme flower of creation, intends, or will allow it to expire with expiring flesh.

> "That each, who seems a separate whole,
> Should move his rounds and, fusing all
> The skirts of self again, should fall
> Re-merging in the general Soul,
>
> "Is faith as vague as all unsweet:
> Eternal form shall still divide
> The eternal soul from all beside,"

and we ourselves shall be knowing, loving, doing, as before, beyond the grave.

> "Contemplate all this work of Time,
> The giant labouring in his youth;
> Nor dream of human love and truth
> As dying Nature's earth and lime;
>
> "But trust that those we call the dead
> Are breathers of an ampler day,
> For ever nobler ends."

Once more, the Evangelist ascribes to Jesus certain further words in which we have Him

forecasting and looking forward to His future occupation in that other abiding-place within the Father's house, to which, according to His view and persuasion, Death would transport Him. "Going further from hence I shall go to prepare a place for you, for you whose spiritual interests I have been studying, whose spiritual culture I have been seeking to forward here."

And what more like Him than this idea of surviving to be still ministering, still engaged in the work of service, in helping onward and upward those who were below and behind? For what else, indeed, would He have dreamed of living, or have desired to live in the beyond, who "came not to be ministered to but to minister," to spend and be spent for others' weal? It may be that from "the beloved, the true-hearted," who have passed within the veil, some spiritual aiding, succouring influences are flowing to us often of which we are unconscious; that to them we owe more than we know or think of holy impulse and impression, of strengthening thoughts that come to us in hours of weakness, or strong, unaccountable upliftings in hours of depression. Jesus, at all events, counted on being serviceably contributive from within the veil to those from whom death took Him; expected that He, with His love for them persisting through death, would continue in some action on their behalf, preparing a place for

them, assisting their preparation for higher place, for higher state and attainment; coming to them, as He is elsewhere reported to have promised, in secret spirit breathings toward their due teaching, or the bringing of divine things, forgotten or faded, to their remembrance. Was it no more than a beautiful dream of His, that might never be fulfilled? Never mind. Anyhow, this was what going on to live in some discarnate state meant for Him—going on to serve. Not sweet rest from mundane trouble and pain, propped on beds of amaranth and moly; not undisturbed blissful contemplation, or ecstasy of beatific vision, but going on to serve. A conception which Tennyson once echoed, who, to Bishop Lightfoot when he asked him, "What is your idea of Heaven?" replied straightly, "Why, perpetual ministry of one soul to another." This, to Jesus, was "Paradise, O Paradise!"

Are we sufficiently in fellowship with His spirit to feel it an alluring prospect? Many there are whom it would scarcely satisfy, for whom it would have but little charm, but quite otherwise, indeed, an outlook somewhat drear and dismal.

"I saw two souls set free shoot up
Into the awful blue,
And heard a voice that called them both
Across the air with earnest sue.

The Untroubled Heart

"'Go thou and serve,' the sentence came,
'Good tidings fly to tell;
Preserve from ill some threatened one!'
Athwart the face there fell
A lengthening shadow, and I caught
A muttered groan of 'Hell!'

"'Go thou and serve!' the same voice said,
'Make noon of life's dark even;
Guide frail souls through earth's storms, and bring
From far the souls God-given!
I saw a rapture-lighted face,
Too blessed to answer 'Heaven!'"

OUR WORDS

" But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." —Matthew xii. 36, 37.

OUR WORDS

THE declaration made here by Jesus concerning every idle word spoken may have been meant to emphasise and accentuate what, according to the narrative, he had just before declared with regard to a certain odious and flagrant word, the utterance of which in His hearing had pained and shocked Him, namely, the insinuation on the part of some of the Pharisees among the multitude that His beneficent works of healing, His merciful exorcisms of demons from the possessed, were wrought by the Devil's help.

This was to Him a horrible slandering, not so much of Himself personally, as of the Holy Spirit that inspired and empowered Him, whose organ, whose vehicle He was in His therapeutic activity, and He had asseverated that, while any basest vilifying of the Son of Man might be forgiven, a vilifying of the Holy Spirit was wholly, and for ever, unpardonable. Hence the assertion in the text immediately following may have been intended to meet the possible objection that He was altogether too severe; was making far too much of a mere bad *word*, and to vindi-

cate, to ratify, the stern sentence of eternal punishment pronounced by Him upon the blasphemy uttered; as though He had said, even every idle word that men may speak will have for them its penal issue, and if so, how infinitely more sure, and more tremendous, must be the penalty for a word of such awful vileness and profanity! If even no simply foolish or frivolous speech is to escape judgment, what shall be the judgment incurred by those who are guilty of defaming with their tongues the Holy Spirit of God!

But one wonders now whether Jesus has been correctly reported here, whether it was actually of no more than *idle* words that He took so serious a view, solemnly insisting that they would all have to be accounted for.

The Greek term thus translated, commentators—feeling a little difficulty, shrinking a little from the idea—have sometimes sought to explain as meaning possibly *false*, *pernicious* or *calumnious;* it means however, nothing of the kind, but, signifying *without work*, is applied to persons unemployed or lazy, and to behaviour and to talk, barren, vacant, vapid; is always, in application to talk, just what we understand by *idle*—in no way harmful or improper but empty and unedifying, or light and trifling; neither good nor bad grain, but volatile flying chaff; as when one does but chatter inanely, or merrily jest.

And did Jesus really express Himself in condemnation or reproof of all such speaking and teach that we shall be held responsible for any indulgence in it? We certainly are by no means careful to avoid it, are often indeed addicted to it, nor can think of it as always reprehensible or unseemly.

Idle words, in truth, may not be wholly unprofitable, are sometimes even of good use—of use if only in being on occasions a necessary preliminary to something wiser or of more worth, necessary pioneers or precursors, preparing the way for wholesome converse; as when at a meeting of friends they will begin with a few manufactured remarks—remarks that are only from the teeth outward, with a few cursory, perfunctory comments on the weather, with an introductory trickle of mere babble, which just serves to set the conversation flowing and opens, so to speak, the gates of intercourse. They must needs maunder thus at first for a while to get the gates open and enter in. But very wholesome often in itself is idle talk, and the idlest, doing good like medicine, invigorating by relaxing, reknitting through unbending, subtly resting and restoring the mind oppressed with thought or dishevelled and distempered by care, leaving us in a somewhat happier and kindlier frame, with clouds or morbid humours that had hung about us cleared away, more bouyant, more

elastic for work or endurance. An hour of it, after severe mental concentration or grave occupation, with friends by the fireside with whom we may have but chatted airily to little or no purpose, without much rhyme or reason, with whom we have but interchanged jokes or wild fantastic fancies — how it has beneficially brightened and freshened us! "Ye brooks," sang Wordsworth,

> "Muttering along the stones a merry noise
> By day, a quiet sound by silent night.
> Ye waves, that out of the great deep steal forth
> In a calm hour to kiss the pebbly shore,
> And you, ye groves, whose ministry it is
> To interpose the covert of your shade
> Even as sleep, between the heart of man
> And outward troubles, between man himself,
> Not seldom, and his own uneasy heart."

And we might almost sing the same in praise of the ministry of occasional idle words; but for them, occasionally, we should miss some gainful temperings and be less healthful on the whole, less inwardly succoured than we are.

Yet that to our every lightest word hangs some judgment of us is true enough; there is a sense in which the utterance of Jesus recorded in the text must be recognised and accepted as most true, for we are being judged continually in respect of all either done or said by us. *Each day* is a day of judgment for me in which all that

goes forth from me, whether of act or speech, indicts and pronounces upon me, and nothing that I may do or say, however casual or trivial, is insignificant or unimportant, since it carries with it ever some judgment of me: some judgment of me, in that I am at once, more or less, indicated and, more or less, affected by it. It is a sign of me—betokens something of my inward form and texture. "Each man," as Lavater says, "has a measure of his own for everything, this he offers you inadvertently in his words; he who deals in superlatives for everything betrays that he wants a measure for great or small,"—and how often are men unwittingly self-betrayed by stray chance remarks of theirs; by some passing comment or sudden exclamation; all unconsciously to themselves, their speech betrayeth them. A syllable or two, on some occasion, in the presence of some scene, or in reference to some subject, falls from their lips, and you discover at once secrets of them behind the veil. You know at once of what sort they are, not only in mind and culture, but in character and moral tone. An unconsidered word dropped by the way, how much it will sometimes tell, to those who hear, of the speaker of which he is not aware—of his real disposition, his interior quality. The thing was spoken without thought—such is the plea, the excuse, but then, under the circumstances, the want of heart,

the hardness or coarseness of nature implied! The jest in itself was innocent enough, but that it could have been made just then—the defect of true sensibility implied. It was but a momentary laugh, but what of the man who could be moved to ripple with laughter at that spectacle, who was able to laugh just there and then? And whether read and interpreted by others or not, many are the signs which we are constantly giving of ourselves, of our inner make and fashion, in slight expressions of ours, both articulate and inarticulate—in which sense our words, grave or gay, are judging us from morn to eve.

But further, there is the judgment of their re-action, their invariable re-action. If something of what one is is revealed or blurted forth in them, something from them is ever left upon one; they are never other than in some degree, to some extent, resilient; some faint imprint of them, some subtle precipitation from them we receive and carry away within us. We speak, whether seriously or lightly, according to what we are, and the speaking goes silently and imperceptibly to affect our being. I cannot be speaking merely thus or thus from day to day, and not be in some measure myself toned and tinctured by the speaking, for better or worse, for richer or poorer. From day to day some unnoted stitches are set by it in the fabric of myself, contributing their part to the growing form and aspect of the

whole; for, while thought or feeling sends out the word, the word sent out casts itself back upon thought and feeling, and tends to feed and nourish that from which it issues; while he who utters a profane or irreverent word shows that there is a foul spot on his mind, the word uttered tends to enlarge or inflame that spot and, with every repetition of it, the stain within is somewhat deepened. Indulge in slanderous tittle-tattle at tea-tables, and every fresh indulgence leaves you somewhat more slanderously disposed, or somewhat less kindly and humane in spirit. Allow yourself to say, again and again, to a visitor, "How delighted, how charmed I am to see you!" when, all the while, you have no smallest pleasure in seeing him, and would rather he had kept away; and each time you say it, your moral delicacy, your sensitiveness to truth, is a little further dulled and deadened; hence, to keep resolutely out of words any unholy or wanton fire that may be burning within helps towards its extinction or abatement by depriving it of such fuel and feeding as it would receive from the wording, and he who learns to order his speaking aright is assisting thereby to preserve in right order his soul, in which sense the Apostle James spoke truly when he said, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man."

But with regard to Christ's denunciation of idle words, what are the idle words which for their

injuriousness and mischievousness deserve to be denounced? Well, here are two examples of them. There are those that simply waste us, wasting that in us which might be utilised, and should be fruitfully expended, that do but dissipate and fritter away our store of spiritual energy—the spiritual energy wanted for action, and that ought to be spent in action, when, instead of prating, we ought to be *doing*, but are left by the prating less fit for doing—less inclined to and less capable of the work that requires to be done. As one has said, "There are two ways in which the steam of machinery may find outlet for its force. It may work, and, if so, works silently, or it may escape, and that takes place loudly with hiss and noise. And there are two ways in which the energy of men's souls may find vent: it may express itself in action, silently, or in mere words, noisily, but just so much of force as is thrown into the latter mode of expression is taken from the former." And the strength—the good strength—squandered often in talk, talk, talk, while claims are calling for effort, while things are waiting to be attempted and accomplished! An old hymn-writer, addressing those who were given to much speculative or complaining babble, sang:

> "Were half the breath thus vainly spent
> To Heaven in supplication sent,
> Your cheerful song would oftener be
> 'Hear what the Lord has done for me.'"

But, were half the breath vainly spent in long trickling talk diverted, and devoted instead to quiet strenuous endeavour, what blessed gains might be conquered that remain unrealised!

"Words, words, words," muttered Hamlet despairingly; and, if there are idle silences to be deprecated as pernicious, there are idle speakings that may be deprecated as more pernicious—those in which energy escapes to miserable waste, that might and should have been poured out in productive labour. But of all idle words none are more worthy of unsparing denunciation than those of slanderous gossip, when, with heads bent together, men and women occupy themselves in retailing to each other calumnious stories, in discussing rumours or suspicions derogatory to the character of some neighbour or acquaintance, whispering eagerly what they have heard hinted or what they imagine against him, pulling him to pieces with zest, or dropping from their tongues like stealthy drops of venom that which will spread and work mischief—mischief perhaps incalculable and enduring—little insinuations, slight innuendoes, aided by poisoning looks or damning gestures. Ah! the wretched consequences often of such gossip, as the slander thus started creeps abroad and circulates and cannot be arrested, or, if arrested and refuted, perhaps leaves some smouldering ember, some

rankling effect of it behind, for, as Shakespeare says:

"Slander lives upon succession,
For ever housed when once it gets possession."

Yes, it goes on corrosively, besmirchingly when you may think you have extinguished it, still remembered to the disadvantage of the victim long after the originator may have forgotten it, remembered here and there with shrugs of suspicion that possibly there may have been some little ground for it, some little particle of truth in it. More of hurt and evil is wrought by it often than by many an atrocious deed, and, in comparison with the word of slander, a volley of profane oaths is harmless and innocent, since, while the former is cruel and malicious and full of deadly virus, the latter means mostly no more than deficiency of suitable language, a vocabulary insufficient for the due expression of the inward heat or feeling.

O man! swear if you will in the heat of your soul, and claim pity and pardon for your want of adequate terms in which to vent it, but bite your tongue when it itches to wag with a petty tale of scandal; recoil as from the Devil, from the impulse to breathe "in perfect confidence, you know," a whisper of detraction.

And again and again they are words, mere words, that do the mischief, with which, while

blameless in act, maybe, we exert some pestilent or unhappy influence, are secretly disordering or defiling.

When Jesus said, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words condemned," he was speaking perhaps of the evil or foolish speakings of some of the scribes and Pharisees in their blind prejudice against and opposition to Himself; was moved perhaps by a sense of the insidious effect of these upon the minds of the people in conducing to deafen many to the voice of truth who else might have heard, to prevent or hinder many, who else might have been drawn into the Kingdom; by the feeling that not even with any falseness or wrongness of their lives were they so pernicious often as they were with these. And worse results *do* sometimes follow from words than from bad or unseemly deeds. Anyhow He meant to express His conviction of the *importance* of words and their power for good or ill—whether for good or ill—and, if sometimes for ill, how frequently are they powers for good, animating, bracing, inspiring, giving birth to, or helping to sustain right conduct, heartening the despondent, energising the weak or faint:—

> "Full many a shaft at random sent,
> Finds mark the archer never meant;
> And many a word at random spoken,
> May wound or soothe a heart that's broken."

"Mere talk," you say, but the reforms that

have come of it, the beneficent movements it has served to initiate. As Louis Stevenson wrote in one of his essays, "By it public wrongs are first declared, public errors first corrected, and the course of public opinion shaped day by day a little nearer to the right. No great measure before Parliament that has not been long ago prepared by the grand jury of the talkers; no book written that has not been largely composed by their assistance! Literature, in many of its branches, is no other than the shadow of good talk."

"Mere words," you say—but the brave work they have caused to be done or have assisted in getting done, the fires they have kindled for some wholesome consuming or purifying, the world-enriching thought they have launched and diffused abroad—thought which is the seed and fountain of all. And what are they but the *words* of Jesus, dropped long ago on Galilean hills and plains, that have performed mighty signs and wonders through the ages, that have gone to nourish far and wide high spirit and life!

"He is only a speaker," you say, "an eloquent speaker of good things," but who can measure or trace all the good among men, in scattered human hearts here and there, which his speaking has somehow quickened or fed?

"He is but a maker of phrases," you say. Ah, well! yet not seldom some pithy, pregnant, or

pungent phrase has been found rehearsing itself persistently to some fine or sweet service in a multitude of minds, and, surviving many a work of the day, has lived on in fecund power.

Let us at all events believe in the importance and worth of good words, of right beautiful, only kindly words, and studying to utter them as often as we may, be sure that they are never without their ministry, however imperceptible and secret, no less sure than was the Hebrew prophet of that Word of the Lord of which he wrote, "As the rain cometh down and the snow from Heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth and prepareth it to bud, so shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth, it shall not return to Me void, but shall accomplish the thing whereto I sent it."

THE MESSAGE TO HEROD

"The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto him, Get thee out, and depart hence: for Herod will kill thee. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following." —Luke xiii. 31, 32.

THE MESSAGE TO HEROD

If we may accept this account, given by the third Evangelist, and by him only, of what took place upon a certain occasion between some of the Pharisees and Jesus, He would seem to have been somewhat disturbed in mind; inclined to be somewhat splenetic; His words in answer to His advising visitors are a little bitter and caustic: "Go, tell that fox." He speaks tauntingly and satirically, like one inwardly sore and hardly like Himself. As we may have thought sometimes with regard to a friend—a usually amiable and sweet-tempered friend—who, to our surprise, has answered us sharply, testily, thinking to ourselves, "What can be the matter with him; why is he thus?"

And how was it that Jesus spoke as He did in reply to the counsel and warning offered by the Pharisees, with such acerbity and sarcasm? Well, may not the explanation lie in the specially perturbed and burdened mental state upon which they intruded; for they came upon Him, with their officious cautioning and admonishing, in an hour in which He was being severely taxed and jaded in soul, when, as we gather from the narrative, He had begun to entertain the thought of quitting Galilee, hitherto the scene of His

labours, and going up to Jerusalem. For He was on His way through the towns and villages of Galilee, journeying towards Jerusalem; was contemplating seriously, at length, a bold advance on the capital, the great school of Jewish orthodoxy and the religious centre of the nation, there, at length, to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom which He had been preaching in the provinces, to see once for all whether or not His call would be responded to; there, at the great annual festival, at which crowds from all parts of the country would be assembled, to make His appeal to the people and see whether or not they would choose to forsake their carnal dreams for the heavenly reality; their soulless forms and worship of the letter for the spirit and life. Yes, after deep deliberation, He would risk trying it. That it was a risk He knew and acknowledged to Himself, but He must deliver Himself now, and in Jerusalem, come what might. He was on the point of daring a great venture, of taking a step which would decide definitely His fortune and the fortune of His cause, and was occupied with troubled ponderings as to the issue, now anticipating and now foreboding, and beset with gloomy doubts of success; eager to essay at Jerusalem the gathering of Israel; irresistibly constrained to go, yet haunted and oppressed the while with presentiments that He was but going to encounter rejection and death.

The Message to Herod

Ah! if you think of it, what must have been the ferment and turmoil of His mind, the heavy weight on His soul in beginning that journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, on which He had just resolved. Then, again, though His ministry in the northern villages had not been without fruit, although from among the rude peasantry and craftsmen numbers had been drawn to hear Him, He had been much harassed of late in His work with opposition, and—judging from the discourse reported, which the Pharisees interrupted, or at the close of which they presented themselves, in which, answering the question of some, "Are there few that be saved?" He bade them beware lest they should not be, and lamented that many who hung on His lips were yet far from the Kingdom—judging from this discourse, He was leaving the north country, His fatherland, disappointed on the whole with the results of His teaching; sad at heart because of the few whom He had really impressed and won, and it was just then, "in that very hour" (as the Revised Version rightly renders the sentence) when, in the midst of the strain of forming a great crucial decision, He was at once looking forward anxiously and apprehensively, and reviewing despondingly; it was in that very hour that these Pharisees bore down upon Him with their gossip of approaching danger, which He should be careful to avoid; trying, in the guise

of friendly warning, to scare Him from the district.

What wonder if the alien intrusion fretted Him? Can we not understand the breaking from Him of the somewhat caustic and bitter reply—"Herod means to kill me, does he? Tell that fox I pursue my work in his province till my time of departure comes, then going surely even to Jerusalem, to meet my fate, since it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." Who does not know how trying and vexatious it is, when one is deeply engrossed, or sighing beneath some burden, to be broken in upon by some chatterers, with their unneeded information, remarks or suggestions, who have not discovered how it is with us; by people who are altogether foreign to us in sympathy and feeling. They set us on edge, prick us till we can scarcely refrain from shooting out a fretful and peevish word. There are those who irritate us in times of private grief or trial with their intermeddling discourse, their attempts at consolation, their "vacant chaff" (to us) though by them "well meant for grain," to whom we are ready to say, as Elisha said impatiently to those who followed and pestered him with their "so then your master is taken from your head to-day?" "Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace."

In exclaiming, "It could not be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem," Jesus was speaking

rather wildly in His pain, forgetting the facts of history, forgetting it was not always so, that prophets had often, indeed, perished out of Jerusalem, that far off from there His immediate predecessor had only lately been done to death. He was too immersed, we may say, in the thought of what lay before Himself to think of this. It was the thought that His own fate as a prophet awaited Him in Jerusalem, the headquarters of religious formalism, that led Him to exclaim thus: "Go, tell that fox!"

But why "fox"? Why not panther or wolf?—either of which epithets, on the supposition that Herod meditated slaughter, would have been more appropriate. Yet, notwithstanding the wolfish profession, the reality may have been vulpine and no more. For a fierce, blustering tongue does not always betoken a ferocious spirit, is sometimes due to the craft of cowardice. A savage threat, instead of expressing an equally savage intention, may have been only a mask, behind which timid anxiety hides itself, hoping therewith to scare. And whatever Herod may have uttered or hinted in the hearing of the Pharisees, he may have harboured no such purpose as they ascribed to him: in fact, from glimpses in the Gospel narrative it seems unlikely. True, he was tyrannical enough; a prophet, mighty in word and deed, had already suffered death at his hands, but into that crime

he had been entrapped against his will, and he seems to have endured, on account of it, a good deal of mental disquietude and remorse, while just now certain superstitious fancies were troubling him. Many about him, acquainted with the works of Jesus, were whispering, "Perhaps it is John the Baptist risen from the dead," and the king, with the blood of the Baptist heavy on his soul, was tormented that it might be so, and would hardly have been forming designs against the life of Jesus; he felt his arm paralysed by his superstitious fears. And again, in the record there is no indication of his having any malice towards Jesus, though we read of his doubts as to who He could be and his curiosity to see Him; nor even, when at a subsequent period he had Him in his power, did he display any animosity. At the present time, such was the fame of Jesus in Galilee that he may well have been anxious to get rid of Him, and may have caused the report to be circulated that he meant to kill Him. And it was because, we may assume, Jesus understood or suspected how it was, saw through the wily artifice and would have his visitors know that he saw, that He replied with the words, "Tell that fox," as though He had said, "Your Herod is only an artful trickster, whose ruse I have penetrated."

But now, with respect to the message sent: "Behold I cast out demons and do cures; I

continue my labours in his territory, whoever may hinder me, to-day and to-morrow, and only on the third day, not here, but in Jerusalem, will my end come." In which utterance two things were implied of what He thought and felt with regard to Himself, His career and destiny. First, the persuasion, the serene confidence that, for the present, He was safe from all lethal injury, invulnerable amid whatever darts should fly; whatever should be devised against Him, the end was not yet; to-day was His, and to-morrow also; of to-morrow even He dared to boast, but there was a set time appointed Him, and that He would surely fulfil; there was a certain work assigned Him to do, and no malice could bring about His destruction until that work was accomplished. A like assurance was intimated in His words on another occasion to His disciples when they endeavoured to dissuade Him from going where, it seemed to them, His life would be in danger; "Are there not twelve hours in a day," He replied—meaning, apparently, that a day was His, of fixed length, and that before the expiration of its term He could not possibly expire, let the peril in front be what it might. For the present, He says, I am bound to survive, and cannot die. A similar confidence has been felt by men sometimes in the pursuit of some great aim. Sooner or later we shall fall victims to disease, and

vanish from our field of labour, but not until we have accomplished something, some of this task that we have in hand; for that, this shadow that waits somewhere on the road must e'en wait. And they have seemed to possess a charmed life, as if dogging death, dogging at their heels, were forbidden to touch them, were detained and kept off from touching them; as if, for the while, they were too intensely diverted and absorbed to die.

But, again, you will notice the peculiar word Jesus used. "On the third day," after having wrought thus and thus to-day and to-morrow, "I shall be perfected." He is made to say, not merely I shall be slain or die, but, "I shall be perfected," that is, not terminated, merely, but completed and fulfilled. We have the same word and its significance shown in the passages: "the spirits of just men made perfect"; "He has perfected for ever them that are sanctified"; "Whoever keepeth the commandments, in him is the love of God perfected"; and, with reference to Himself, "It behoved him to make the Captain of salvation perfect through suffering."

Thus the idea would be that in looking forward to His death, He regarded it as not merely the conclusion of His earthly course, but as denoting the consummation of the whole object of that course, believing that, come when or how it might, would be no abrupt cutting off, no breaking short,

no leaving something unfinished that might have been and would have been finished had He but had longer time, but that, come when it might, it would mean and mark the full completion of all for which He had been sent; that Heaven had done with and by Him here all for which it had placed Him here; that He had served in the world His divine use, and only therefore was taken hence. A beautiful feeling to have, truly, in one's closing hours; but how, you may ask, could *He* have had it, who was disappointed of achieving much which He had hoped to achieve; who had failed to effect what He had aimed at and toiled to effect; who had wept those bitter tears over Jerusalem, because He had yearned to gather her children into the kingdom, and was not able; because He had to leave His disciples still, more or less, in bondage to the false ideals from which He had tried to emancipate them; with many things to say to them, which, as yet, they were insufficiently matured to bear.

"Ah," He would have said, "I am but Another's organ and instrument, an instrument chosen and fashioned by One above me, employed for what He intends to have wrought by me, and, though what I think and plan may fall short of being, *that* will certainly be accomplished during my mortal term. My work is not what I may think and plan to accomplish, but what He means, and, meaning, will surely have accomplished through

me, as, with whatever of ill-success according to my view, I only aspire and strive according to the light that is in me, as the tool wielded answers promptly to the touch—follows faithfully the pressure of the great Master's hand." His confidence, that in dying His life would have quite fulfilled its ends, was due to two things: His belief that God had raised Him up and was applying Him for ends of His own which must be realised; and His consciousness of fidelity to the vision of truth and duty given Him.

And in proportion as such fidelity is ours, we are all of us perfected in the day of our departure hence, in the sense of having served our full use here, that the mysterious heavenly powers have finished their work in us, whatever of our own we may have left unfinished; that, however we may have striven to do or minister and failed—it may even be blundered and erred in the doing—yet in our striving the heavenly powers have got out of us all that they meant and wanted. Every sincere and earnest soul is for more of good and service in his place and in the world than he dreams; while he fails and laments, and thinks he is of no service, the One over all, whose puppets we are, is doing with him much of which he may never be aware. As is shown in the story imagined by Robert Browning of Pippa, the little silkwinder, whose morning hymn,

which she sings blithely as she passes down the street, proved, all unknown to her, God's arrow, appointed for the piercing of several sinful human hearts; whose unconscious errand it was to act convertingly with her singing on four different lives around her.

We are, each and all of us, it seems to me, for His using, who has made and fixed us here; for His using, or towards something that He would have done, in contribution, great or small, to the sum of things, and all that is required of us is to be plastic for Him in studying to be true. Only be true to your individual self; true to your best thoughts; true, in loyal endeavour, to the highest that you see, and, walking thus to-day and to-morrow, in the day of your ceasing to walk your life and mission will be divinely completed, cease when or how you may.

"Lord, take and use Thy work:
Amend what flaws may lurk,
What strain o' the stuff, what warpings past the aim!
My times be in Thy hand!
Perfect the cup as planned!
Let age approve of youth, and death complete the same!"

ENTERING INTO THE CLOUD

" They feared as they entered into the cloud."—Luke ix. 34.

ENTERING INTO THE CLOUD

THESE were the three Apostles specially beloved of the Master, whom, according to a celebrated legend, a cherished tradition of the early Church, He took with Him, one day, to some remote mountain solitude to share His devotional retirement—when, as He knelt in prayer among them, they beheld Him suddenly transfigured in aspect, His bent form rearing itself like a palm-tree from pressure, His careworn countenance shining like a sun, His very raiment resplendent, caught in a shower of dazzling radiance, while beside Him grew visible apparitions from the spirit world, glorified figures of the illustrious dead, with whom He seemed to hold converse. So enchanting to the gazers was the wonderful spectacle that, in their ecstasy of delight, they desired it might never fade away; yearned to abide for ever in the rapture of it; crying, "Lord, it is good to be here, here and thus let us stay, returning no more to the daily round, the common scene below." And this was the cloud which, presently descending, enveloped them all, and extinguished the spectacle, changed their blissful ravishment to a cold chill of fear;

as, often, at the height of our joy, an unexpected shadow falls that puts a cruel end to it, and we, who were glad the moment before, are grieving. For, indeed, our brilliant and exquisite hours, detain them though we would, are not to be kept for long, all too quickly they pass, to be straitly followed, sometimes, by thick murk or deep gloom, and in a breath, perhaps, "our harp is turned to mourning, our organ to the voice of them that weep." We have all had some experience of these unwelcome, sharp transitions, these abrupt overcastings of skies that glowed, and, such is the oft-found nearness to our happiest laughter of saddest tears, that a great, intense happiness is not seldom accompanied by a vague dread or presentiment of impending ill.

But let me speak for a little while of some clouds with which we are more or less familiar, that come down upon us at times as we take our way through the days. There is the cloud of the mystery into which we enter and are plunged when once we begin to think or inquire, to examine or contemplate, which is then unescapable and, gathering, grows with our further thought or research. The cloud of mystery that we are to ourselves, and become increasingly with increasing investigation, with new disclosures concerning us, or glimpses caught of our latent contents, the more we ascertain and learn about ourselves. To our forefathers, we were so simple

and intelligible in comparison with our puzzling complexity to-day. We have been revealed, to the discovery that we include far more than we are conscious of, depths subterranean, below our consciousness; that the person who appears is by no means the whole of us; that we are not the unit we had seemed, but many and diverse in one, and "Which of the number is I?" we ask perplexed. Powers that had not been suspected stir in us to our surprise—stir and disappear.

> "We fancy that we put forth all our life,
> And never know how with the soul it fares."

Who, however self-explored, is able to explain or compass in his survey the round of *himself*? And all about us, over the world and existence, hangs the cloud of the mystery. In it we live and move and have our being; whatever of light that had not been may break and spread as we advance, we stand encompassed still with huge belts of darkness, belts of darkness that sometimes weigh upon us heavily and breed sighs of impatience or of vain longing—vain longing to pierce the impenetrable veil and solve the insoluble.

Yet, look you, would we really wish to have all solved that continues to baffle and defy us? Are we not wholesomely and beneficently served in some respects by the cloud that will not melt or disperse? Is it not an angel, after all, with whom

we wrestle to no purpose, who, in spite of our wrestling, refuses to declare himself, and tell us his name? May we not say in the shrouding night, as the Apostles said in the effulgence, "Lord, it is good for us to be here," with the night about us?

Yes, it has its ministry for us, a ministry which, without it, we should have missed. We get from it a certain education and discipline that would not otherwise be ours, are kept healthfully chastened with reverence, with awe, with a wise humility in the pride of manifold attainments and achievements, and healthfully exercised in mind, stirred to speculations and inquiries which, though futile, are not unfruitful; by which, if unillumined, we are braced and cultured. The world without the mystery to burden us, to irk and tantalise, would be a poorer, tamer and less tuitional world, and would afford less food and offer less scope for imagination, for which where all is found and nothing lost, all shown and nothing hidden, there is no food or scope. Give me, for thought quickening and thought ranging, not plainness and clearness divine, but rather duskiness and dimness divine; a beauty half-revealed and half-concealed; a glory with a covering upon it, or what one has called, "the infinite liberty of the shadow." Give me, for the charm and satisfaction of dreaming, a temple with some chamber in it closely veiled, rather than a

temple with the veil rent in twain, and the secrets of the chamber laid bare. Is there not, for us, often an impressiveness, a suggestiveness in what we look upon—a picture or a landscape—that is partially obscured by curling mist, or fading light, which we do not find in what is perfectly distinct and defined. The ancient Greek painter understood that, when, in seeking to represent most impressively to the spectators, the overwhelming grief of Agamemnon at the death of his daughter, Iphigenia, he drew a curtain over the face of the agonised parent. And what would it be that made the mountain in the wilderness, on whose summit Jehovah was supposed to be talking with Moses, so awe-thrilling to the Israelites gazing from the plain below, but the dense cloud that covered the mount? Of mystery, indeed, religion was born, and by it is stimulated and sustained; without it man had scarcely learnt worship. And while implying knowledge—for it is only as we begin to know that we begin to be sensible of it, and the more, the more knowledge extends—it is at the same time the concealment from us of our ignorance, allowing us to go on in peace and quietness, all unconscious of the amount of this, all unconscious of what is, immense, stupendous, beyond our vision or conjecture, the manifestation of which might prove more than we could bear, too much for mortal endurance. The discovery of one long-hidden

law of Nature drove Sir Isaac Newton, I have read, near to madness, prevented his sleeping, and worked him up to such a pitch of nervous excitement that, to save himself from madness, he was obliged to surrender the calculation to another just before he had completed it; and, perhaps, the mystery that conceals from us our ignorance is a mercy to our weakness, for, if the discovery of one long-hidden law of the universe shattered the equanimity of a Newton, all but unhinged that clearest and strongest of intellects, what might not be the terrible effect upon us, were we permitted to penetrate to *all* that hides behind the veil?

But other clouds there are into which we enter now and again with something of a shiver, out of the sunshine, or in pursuing our course. There is the cloud of disappointment in well-doing, in the prosecution of worthy effort, of noble or benevolent work. Many earnest and generous souls have known the chill of it. They had formed such admirable projects, which surely could not but succeed, had started with such hope and confidence, counting on accomplishing, as they desired, with comparative ease; counting on the appreciation and sympathy which they felt that their enterprise deserved; full of great expectations, entertaining no thought of failure, no thought of possible unforeseen misadventures and miscarryings, of possible baffling difficulties or

thwarting oppositions. And, for a while, perhaps, all has gone smoothly, with bright promise, but gradually have come vexations and hindrances, of which they had not dreamt; fierce hostilities of ignorance and prejudice; enemies where they had looked for friends, or desertion of friends where they had looked for constancy. Unselfish in motive and impulse, meaning only others' good, callous unresponsiveness, or, maybe, gross ingratitude, has disheartened and somewhat embittered them. It was all so different from their happy assurance of what would be, and they have been ready, almost, to cry with the Hebrew prophet, "Lord, Thou hast deceived me and I am deceived; in aiming to serve as moved and inspired by Thee, Thou hast left me unrewarded, to be ashamed and confounded."

Their mistake was that they allowed themselves to be too sanguine, to set out unprepared in mind for what might have to be borne and suffered, and disappointment lies heavy and crushingly upon their heart.

Then there is the cloud into which they enter who wake up at length from some pleasing illusions in which they have lived, to the bleak and stern reality, to find that things are not what they had seemed, but much less beautiful and fair; that their idols of pure gold were mixed with clay; that the heroes of their adoration were hardly worth the homage and worship they

have paid them; or that some in whom they have implicitly trusted were not true. It is with them as when into a delicious vision of the night upon our bed something breaks disturbingly, and the beauty and the splendour that had been so real is found to have been no more than a phantasm of sleep; as when one awakes from a luxurious dream of wandering in sunny lotus lands, lulled with warm airs and listening to "sweet music that softly falls as petals from blown roses on the grass," to the cold and gloom of a wintry morning with the icy sleet beating on the window pane. "So, this is life" they have said mournfully, "and thus things are, not as we have been supposing."

Or the glamour and the glory has faded from their ideals; faith in them withers, their pursuit of them hitherto has been foolishness, the pursuit of an *ignis fatuus*. These ideals of theirs that kindled their ardour must be turned from and given up; experience has proved the folly of harbouring and essaying to follow them, has proved that in existing circumstances and conditions it is utterly useless to think of keeping them; that there are no such divine possibilities as their young hearts have imagined, no such mountain-tops for gaining as their young eyes had seen.

Or it is the cloud of doubt with regard to certain dear religious beliefs into which they are entering, as with many to-day, for whom foundations are being shaken on which they

had built their house; for whom thought and inquiry are rendering uncertain much that had been sure, crumbling, one after another, sanctuaries in which they had sheltered; who are finding, with a sense of nakedness, that this and this in which they were peacefully ensconced must be surrendered, until it seems as though of the ancient creed in which they were nurtured scarce a shred remains to them, scarce anything of clear, indubitable verity upon which the heart may rest and with which the life may be inspired. And, like the man in the Book of Judges whose private chapel was rifled by marauders, they stand crying in secret, if not aloud, "Ye have taken away my gods and my priest, and what have I left?"

There are those with whom it is thus, whom thought and inquiry are compelling to renounce, with something of reluctance, what they had been carrying with them and hoarding as sacred things, and who are rather sad at the enforced renunciation. But then, in all such renunciation, there is always something left, by which the soul may still live and thrive, and, however little it may be, to lose to the utmost of once sacred beliefs, in earnest and courageous pursuit of truth, is not loss, but gain.

One cloud there is which overshadows us all in moments of self-reflection, when we pause to review—namely, the sense of the better that might have been, and has not been; of heights

beyond our reached heights, that might have been reached, to which we have not risen; the sense of failure in our best, of failure to attain to the more that waited to be attained to; of flaws in the work in which, at the time, none were found. Any serious, honest retrospect, does it not bring over us always, amidst all our possible satisfaction and self-approval, something of this chilling cloud?

We elders look back, toward evening, in the still twilight, upon the day behind us, and how much poorer it looks—the action with which its hours were filled, the fine or the fair things done in it—than when the hours were running, and we were busily doing. If it be no "faded, ignoble life that we see stretching out like the desert its weary, unprofitable length," it is ever a life faultier or more imperfect than we saw while living it. At eventide there is light whose revealings leave us more or less self-discontented, where, during the day, perhaps, we had been tolerably content, and what earnest soul is there whose dying pillow is not haunted with the pensive melancholy feeling of aspirations unrealised, of what he would have been and has missed being, of the gleam, followed wistfully over hill and dale, that was never overtaken? Yet, while passing from hence under this shadow, may he not pass in hope of some fulfilment beyond, singing as he goes:

Entering into the Cloud

"The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that He heard it once; we shall hear it by-and-by."

With what fear, again, have we entered occasionally into the cloud of some great trial approaching, seen to be impending, seen coming to us, like the gathering of a tempest in a quiet sky. We have shrunk from it as from something to which our capacity of endurance would not be equal; it has seemed to us that we should never be able to bear it, that, however we may have contended with the footmen and run with the horsemen without fainting, in these threatened swellings of Jordan we must e'en sink; and yet, somehow, we have borne them; with the bursting of the dreaded storm have risen to the occasion, have found in ourselves, by the grace of God, a strength for enduring of which we had not dreamt; notwithstanding our apprehensions and forebodings, we have pulled through, and, if with torn sails and broken rigging, have floated into port at last, not only saved from wreck, but consciously enriched with discipline received and lessons learnt; chastened, mellowed, deepened by the experience, the prospect of which had appalled us.

There are times, moreover, in national life and history, when, to our feeling, we are entering a cloud, when, as now, perhaps, in the scene around

and before us, so many ugly features or ominous symptoms appear, and the outlook, we say dolefully, is very dark.

There are such tremendous problems multiplying, to be faced and wrestled with, such loomings of evil or peril to come; all is being unsettled that had been long established; old faiths, that once inspired and nourished, are slowly dying out, and what will replace them for the needed inspiration and nourishment? Strong sanctions that had held us are becoming weak and weaker; signs of physical and moral deterioration are becoming visible among the people; religion, as one has declared, is no longer that supreme, penetrating, decisive part of our lives that it has been; conscience has lost something of its strong, onpressing energy; the sense of personal responsibility something of its sharpness of edge. The natural hue of spiritual "resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast" of confused, distracted, wavering thought, and how, we ask, will it all end, are we nearing at length the brink of national decadence and downfall? We are depressed, perhaps, with regard to the future, and by not a few pessimistic forecastings and Cassandra-prophecies. Yet hope, surely, may conquer fear; the belief that, if travailing painfully, we are travailing in birth, toward the birth of some better thing determined for us. For other times there have been of like

forbidding aspect that have gradually cleared and brightened, and proved but the transition, rough and stormy, from the old to some new in advance upon it, and, so long as there are those in our midst—many or few—robust and brave, fired with noble zeal and enthusiasm, yearning and labouring for truth and righteousness, "we shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord"; we are going "to beat our music out" through whatever of lingering harsh discords. It is no rampant ugliness deplored which is destined to survive, but the beauty that breathes over against it, and feebly struggles to break forth.

"Tho' love be bought and honour sold,
The sunset keeps its glow of gold,
And round the rosy summits cold,
The white clouds hover, fold on fold.

"Tho' over-ripe the nations rot,
Tho' right be dead and faith forgot,
Tho' one dull cloud the heavens may blot,
The tender leaf delayeth not.

"Tho' all the world lie sunk in ill,
The bounteous autumns mellow still;
By virgin sand and seaworn hill
The constant waters ebb and fill.

"From out the throng and stress of lies,
From out the painful noise of sighs,
One voice of comfort seems to rise:
It is the meaner part that dies.'"

Or, in the words of a greater poet, who sang thus :

"There shall never be one lost good! What was,
shall live as before;
The evil is null, is nought, is silence implying
sound;
What was good, shall be good, with, for evil, so
much good more."

PARABLE OF THE PARTED RAIMENT

"They parted His raiment among them."—John xix. 24.

PARABLE OF THE PARTED RAIMENT

THIS is what became of the raiment of Jesus on the night of His condemnation to death; the soldiers, appropriating what the doomed man had worn, parted it among them. That which had clothed His sacred body was scattered abroad to be used by other persons for other purposes, to be found in portions, in fragments, here and there, variously applied, doing various and strange service. Ah! the pathos of the garments of the dead left with us without them, limp, empty things, which the familiar form once filled and fills no more, and hither and thither they go, sold, given away, or locked out of sight in some remote, unvisited chamber or dusky lumber room. But this dividing of His raiment at the end of His course—was it not an unconscious prefiguring, an unconsciously acted parable of what was destined to be done with Himself after His decease, of how He Himself would be dealt with?

A great man dies, and biographers and commentators and critics part him among them, each giving his own estimate, his own representation of him; emphasising certain features or qualities

scarcely noticed by others; making prominent, or exaggerating, what others hardly note, or, noting, reduce to smaller proportions; colouring the picture according to the measure of affection or sympathy felt; leaving some particular side or aspect of him specially impressed upon us, of which elsewhere we may get little or no impression. The portrait varies a good deal as drawn for us on their several pages.

And Jesus passed from earth to be straightway divided—divided between the four Evangelists, so-called, each of whom, whatever the coincidence and likeness between them, reports *his* part of Him, from his own point of view, from *his* understanding or remembrance, and needs to be supplemented by and combined with the rest toward any gaining of the whole. The all of Him is in none of the four alone; He is distributed among them with shades of difference; something missing in Mark which Luke supplies, something set forth and shown by John which in Matthew is wanting. Was He not further divided in the Petrine and Pauline gospels and—somewhat sadly—in the controversy between the two parties created, one of whom cried: "I am of Paul," and the other: "I am of Cephas." While, separate from and more or less at variance with both, stood the followers of James in Jerusalem.

Yes, the original simplicity of the Christ was

not long in disappearing, broke up before long into diversities of creed and belief, of statement and ceremonial. So it went on through the generations—has gone on down to to-day; the unity of Him lost in the divers and conflicting sects of Christendom, each of which claims its theological system or ecclesiastical polity as most nearly in accord with His elements, and while carrying with them His name inscribed on their banners and extolled in their hymns, how far have they all diverged or drifted from His simple faith, His pure religion. Where is the very Christ borne on with His Name? Where represented in Church doctrine and life without any detracting addition or adulterating mixture? It is but something of Him, here and there, in individual souls and differing religious bodies—but scattered pieces of the holy and beautiful robe which we have with us. It is visibly parted among us in modern Christianity, which is by no means one thing but many, having many and varied forms, which a writer has lately enumerated and described in words of which the following is, briefly, the substance:—

"First, there is what may be termed evangelical Christianity, which insists on a forensic scheme of salvation, clinging to Hebraistic and Hellenistic ideas of blood and vicarious sacrifice; the central feature of which is salvation by faith in the Atonement, a redemption accomplished for

us by the passion and death of Jesus. Then there is the ecclesiastical Christianity, which insists on the saving efficacy of certain rites and ceremonies and priestly office, building less upon an historic past than upon a present virtue residing in the Church, communicated through the proper functionaries, the mysteriously endowed dispensers of the means of grace; attaching great importance to sacred things and material acts of worship, such as the sacraments. Then there is practical or pragmatical Christianity, which regards doctrine and belief as of secondary moment, cares little or nothing for dogmas and formularies, and lays the chief stress on conduct and good works as the supreme, the only essential thing. Then, lastly, there is the mystical or emotional form of Christianity, which seeks by rapt adoration and contemplation to rise to the height of spiritual ecstasy, tending somewhat in this high quest to the cloistered habit of life, to isolate itself from the world in order to gain and keep the beatific vision."

Yes, into these—Low Church, High Church, Broad Church, and the Church of the monastically inclined—the Christ who lived and taught in Judæa is divided; wholly absent from none, and in none perfect and entire; with something of Himself breathing and expressed in all, and, in all, with something of abridgment and alloy.

But, leaving this, in the incident of the parting

of the raiment of Jesus we may find for the moment a symbol or a suggestion of that breaking of unity, that division of the one into the many which frequently occurs, in *one* sense and another ; which, perhaps, in one sense and another *has* to occur in the process and progress of things. It takes place down below us in those primitive organisms, consisting of a single cell, which, increasing in size to a certain point, is then divided in two, by which means the further existence of the organism is secured, when again, with the growing complexity of the organism, functions originally discharged by a single cell are distributed among several, severally set apart and specialised for the performance of what had been performed by one. So, too, in the case of the human creature, the primeval unit of prophet, priest and king in one individual was gradually broken up, and the kingly, priestly and prophetic offices, once united in him, were separated, to be sustained by two individuals; while, moreover, with the birth and development of the moral sense, the human creature became himself divided—no longer the one that he had been, but twain—two from thenceforth in the same breast, and more or less opposed and conflicting; pulling different ways; the flesh warring against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh ; he, who in the beginning had moved all together like a cloud, when he moved at all, having within him

the disturbance and turmoil of two contrary motions, a conjunction of contending influences where there had been a peaceful universe. Then, in the course of time, have come such divisions and sub-divisions of labour, more and more distribution of the work which had been done by one pair of hands to the hands of the many, each of whom does but his particular part of the whole, and has nothing to do with the other parts; to the making of what had been made and finished by the same craftsman a number of craftsmen contributing, while, with the enlargement of the field of knowledge, departments of inquiry and research have multiplied, and where men had ranged over it together, they must e'en choose and take separately their own department; confine themselves mostly to that, to their little corner of the wide and ever widening field. And there is more and more of specialising in scientific study and investigation; the specialist is with us to-day as he was not in days of old. In the world of thought, again, whatever is communicated is instantly and inevitably divided, is no more the one that it was, but discreted in the minds to which it is communicated. When once an idea goes forth from mind to mind it undergoes changes, the idea received is not identical with the idea conveyed, but to some extent a differentiation from it; the one idea has become two; my thought delivered to and

lodged in you is never quite what it is in me from whom it comes to you, for you, in taking it, are yourself subtly added to and mixed with it to some tempering of it; thinking with me in ever so close an agreement you are yet thinking other than I, the same thought in our minds is not wholly the same, as the flower plucked and brought into the room from the garden is not the very flower that fluttered and flaunted there in the outer air and sunlight. The one object or subject contemplated by several persons becomes several, breaks into different facets or phases; as many as are the percipients, so many are the perceptions. If, during a summer day's walk, we stand looking together at a particular landscape spread out before us, no two of us see exactly alike, and the number of impressions received is equal to the number of beholders. Let a company of ten write their description or report of a view on which they have gazed together from some beautiful summit, and the view described by them will be not one but ten; each will be found to have observed something unmarked by others, and we shall get the best representation of the view by blending the ten accounts.

So with religious and spiritual truth. It is one thing distributed in divers shreds, in portions and fragments; distributed in our several trowings according to our several make and mentality. The truth is one; the one sun in

the heavens of which our truths or trowings are scattered and broken rays; the one ocean flowing round us and beating on our shores, certain waves or sprays from which reach us as we are reachable; the one spring in the lap of the high mountains, with little wandering rills from which our meadows are watered. The whole is not given to any of us, to any religious body or group of devout souls, but is parted among us, and hence none may presume to exclude or slight the others, and each may gather to profit something from all. Nothing indeed, as has been said, is clearer in the history of Christianity than that the views which the different Churches hold are complementary one to the other; that no one of them has the entire secret, or grasps the full of the verity; that every one of them may learn in a measure from every other, and that mere theoretical completeness can be attained only by endeavouring to combine something of the insight and the vision of all.

So it was in the beginning. St. John differed from St. Matthew, and St. Paul from both, because the Christ, only a part of whose plenitude each could comprehend and utter, was greater than all. Some distant day, perhaps, these prismatic hues of historic Christianity may melt into the pure, white radiance of the ideal Church of the future; now, all we can do is to count and mark the various rays, nor prize those

least which may be most remote from the light of our own life.

And, look you, it is just because we ourselves are fundamentally *one* that we are divided in thought and belief. There is no unity, in fact, in any number of things that are perfectly alike, these are no more than a collection of like things; unity is only in the union somewhere, at some point, of things unlike. We say of such and such objects or persons that they differ—we mean or imply always that somewhere, at some point, they are knit in resemblance, and from thence diverge into certain dissimilarities. And differing religious thoughts and beliefs cover and indicate the common religiousness, the underlying oneness of the religious instinct, aspiration and sympathy; the unity of the spirit behind all variety and diversity of form or expression, which, in the multitude of human minds, must needs issue in such variety and diversity. This unity exists and abides amidst whatever of division, and however we may stand aloof from each other or dissent and dispute; as all men everywhere are one at their roots in identity of nature, in spiritual wants and necessities, feelings and desires shared, let them be separated and estranged as they may, so all religious sects are one in a corresponding religious sense and sentiment, let them stand severed as they may in doctrine and creed. Which unity, you may remember, the Apostle

exhorted the Ephesians to keep, meaning, not that they should keep it in existence, since it existed always quite independently of them, of what they might do or fail to do, but that they should keep it (while always existing) present to to the mind and in sight, keep it from disappearing, from being contracted or obscured, from having its manifestation thwarted or disturbed, keep it in evidence and as a felt reality. And it was to be then kept, according to his direction, "in the bond of peace," by which he meant, it would seem, the peace composed of or resulting from that meekness and lowliness and long-suffering and reciprocal forbearance in love, the cultivation and practice of which he had just been inculcating; the peace, we may say, of tranquil tolerance and large charity; of recognising steadily and owning readily each other's gifts, graces and virtues amidst all that might be repellent or unsatisfactory; of discerning and emphasising continually the points of agreement and sympathy amidst all discordances; the peace of abstention from exhibitions of bigotry, from provoking arrogance, from noisy disputatiousness, from virulence or acerbity in necessary controversy, from the angry heat which kindles noxious flame; the peace of working together harmoniously and heartily for good objects when unable to think or believe in unison. In the bond of such peace the existing unity is made

perceptible, is realised and developed where otherwise it is virtually lost, as it is sometimes in a family, when for a while the various members are irritable, touchy, short-tempered, quick with the caustic retort or the satirical comment, with the second word which starts the strife, rather than with the soft answer that turns away wrath; when under small provocations they let themselves go without forbearance, instead of holding themselves in until the provocation is past. They are united all the time, closely united in sincerest affection, though a spectator just then would scarcely think it; the unity, which is, is temporarily overshadowed and concealed, not kept in evidence and expression in the bond of peace. There is often such unity among men that does not appear, the slumbering unity of sentiment, slumbering and unsuspected until, perhaps, something occurs, something is said or done that brings it out vividly; as when, for instance, in a mixed motley assembly of people, of people belonging to opposite and hostile political parties, bristling with spikes of disagreement, an eloquent speaker, with his words, touches a chord which shows at once where they are deeply united, and under his influence the diverse multitude are for the moment made one, throbbing with one pulse of emotion. Or when, again, to a nation broken into rival factions, fiercely contending with each other, each intent only on its own interests

and objects, divided and rent by narrow party passions in the heat of which patriotic solicitude and zeal would seem to have perished—there comes at length a great national crisis, a great national calamity or peril, a mustering against her, at her gates, of foreign foes, and then in that hour of trial all differences, all strifes, are forgotten in one great wave of feeling, and the sleeping patriotism in the breasts of all awakes and declares itself.

We are often more united in our separations and sunderings than we know or remember, and it should be ours, for our richer mutual inheritance and our finer mutual behaviours, to seek out ever, or bear in mind, the unity of spirit, of aspiration in those most widely parted in idea or expression; the unity, moreover, of the manifold creation in the common life from God, which wells up in every human soul, noble or mean, richly gifted or scantily endowed, saintly or simple, and in every creature that breathes, from man at his highest down to beast and bird; the unity of myself with all living things and of all living things with me, as being, together, but varying manifestations of the Whole, of the one Eternal. To keep the essence of this, to have it cherished and realised in our thought, would tend to melt many an antipathy into sympathy, and to promote the diffusion and reign among us of fair dealing and justice and love.

THE DEW OF YOUTH

"Thou hast the dew of thy youth."—Ps. cx. 3.

THE DEW OF YOUTH

THIS sentence occurs in one of the so-called Messianic psalms. It is a song sung by some patriotic Hebrew poet on the sallying forth of the king to war, to whom he hears Jehovah promising support and success in the coming campaign, and sees in imagination Jehovah himself accompanying the king, as his chariot rolled away, driving with him, seated by his side, to the battle. Fired by which vision, he pictures him triumphantly victorious over his foes, their power shattered, and the field heaped with their dead bodies; while he describes the enthusiasm of the people for the sovereign and his cause, the readiness with which they flock to follow him on his march to the frontier, the great multitude, eager to put themselves at his disposal for the fray; and the splendid appearance of the troops, in their glittering armour, like priests clad in sacred vestments, or victims decked for the sacrifice, innumerable and brilliant as dew-drops from the womb of the morning, and fresh as dew in comprising all the fine youth, all the young blood and vigour of the land.

But in the course of time the Psalm came to

be read as a prophetic description of what should be achieved by the future Messiah, of whom the nation dreamt; to whom, indeed, would be the gathering of the people; who would prove the champion of Israel's redemption, and of whose kingdom and dominion there would be no end, His name enduring for ever, His name continuing as long as the sun throughout all generations. Well, now, of the Christ who rose at length in their midst—a rare new soul—so new among them, among their religious ceremonials and formularies, their tradition-bound scribes and elders, their worn and weary, their labouring and heavy-laden; so new in His frame of thought, His unworldliness, His pure simplicity, His bright and happy faith, His fulness and fervour of spiritual life, who with His breath breathed abroad new life, infused new hope and aspiration, waking many who had slept in the dust of the earth, lifting up many that were bowed down, and re-juvenating hearts that were dulled and dried, —of Him may we not say that He has the dew of His youth, has through the ages retained it, and retains it still? Yes! the divine Child of ancient Galilee has not passed. He is with us to-day, witnessing to the things of the spirit; pointing and inviting towards what is above, towards something better and higher than we are at our best and highest; troubling our pools of low content; rebuking our materialism; shaming our selfish-

ness. He has never yet faded out of the eye of the world, has never yet ceased to interest or to attract and charm. If He was never born as they related Him to have been, His figure on the page abides, and casts its spell down time. If Christianity be decayed or discredited, *He* is not. The meeting of working-men some while ago at which clergymen were hissed gave, unanimously, three cheers for Jesus Christ. If doctrines concerning Him have failed, He survives in grace and beauty unimpaired; unsurpassed His ideal endures, eclipsed by no onward growth or movement of ours; leads the way and goes before us, advance as we may; hangs as a heaven overhead

> "to let us see
> How boundless might our soul's horizons be,
> How vast, yet of what clear transparency.
> How it were good to live there and breathe free;
> How fair a lot to fill
> Is left to each man still!"

Universal assimilation or approximation to His ideal, we are constrained to own, would be the redemption of society.

And in these latter days has He not renewed His youth, in the sense of re-appearing to view after more or less of concealment from observation; in the sense of coming forth afresh in pristine form from obscuring veils that had more or less secluded or disguised Him? From the

mass, the cloud of Church formulas and Church dogmas about Him, with which He was somewhat overlaid, in which the very man Himself was lost or bedimmed, He has emerged in our day from these, rising again as He rose of old when they had buried Him; and the divine Man of Nazareth is nearer to us and clearer than He was, showing unmasked His beautiful human face; speaking straight home His immortal words of everlasting truth; living before our eyes His life of lofty morality and supreme devotion.

"Though dead, not dead,
Not gone though fled,"

but recovered and remanifested.

But, leaving this and turning to ourselves—amid the many fallings from us and vanishings of which we are often rather mournfully conscious, amid the much that droops and withers in process of time, which the action of the years tends to wear down and wear away, or from which the early bloom gradually evaporates—what good things of our world there are, of which it may be said that they have the dew of their youth, suffering neither diminution nor decay, which continue even as they were from the beginning. The sense of the unseen; the idea of duty; the constraint of conscience; the thirst for knowledge; the capacity for sympathy; the curiosity that spurs to action; the

hope that sustains in effort; the charity that looks upon the things of others; the fellowship of kindred minds; the sanguine trust; the bliss of blissful memories. If it were true (as it is not) that

> "no girl
> Now reads in her bosom as clear
> As Rebekah read, when she sate
> At eve by the palm-shaded well;
> Or guards in her breast
> As deep, as pellucid a spring
> Of feeling, as tranquil, as sure,"

there is still ever freshly repeated maidenhood's happy romance, woman's blind faith and devotion, and subtly ministering affection in her sphere; the motherly love, self-forgetting and self-sacrificing, which many waters cannot quench, nor the floods drown. If it were true (as it is not) that

> "no bard,
> At the height of his vision, can deem
> Of God, of the world, of the soul,
> With a plainness as near,
> As flashing as Moses felt,
> When he lay in the night by his flock
> On the starlit Arabian waste;
> Can rise and obey
> The beck of the Spirit like him,"

there is still as fresh as ever the inspiration of genius; the poet's afflatus; the vision of the ideal amidst the sadness or greyness of the

actual; the looking before and after, and the pining for what is not; the fond persuasion of "some far-off, divine event" towards which we are travelling, of some ultimately satisfying human destiny; the courage heroic; the patience sublime in suffering; the consecration here and there of those who cleave to principle and can for no profit be seduced. If it be true that

> "repose has fled
> For ever the course of the river of Time.
> That cities will crowd to its edge
> In a blacker, incessanter line;
> That the din will be more on its banks,
> Flatter the plain where it flows,
> Fiercer the sun overhead,"

yet

> "The stars come out, and the night wind
> Brings up the stream
> Murmurs and scents of the infinite sea."

And we go on aspiring as ever, conceiving of the things that are more excellent, fashioning and following ideals; and the eye of imagination is not dimmed, nor her natural force abated, and, while religions may fail, the religious sentiment and spirit abides—while alike on Mount Gerizim and Mount Moriah temples may sink to ruin and disappear, worship persists, and hearts are saying, as they said of yore,

> "We men who, in our morn of youth, defied
> The elements, must vanish: be it so!
> Enough, if something from our hands have power
> To live and act, and serve the future hour;

And if, as towards the silent tomb we go,
Through love, through hope, and faith's
transcendent dower,
We feel that we are greater than we know."

There are things among us, by the way, which wax old and dissolve because they are incapable of changing in adaptation to new circumstances and conditions, or cannot move in response to the movement of the day, capacity for which would have sufficed to preserve them; would have kept them firm and flourishing. But they were too rigid, too stubbornly unyielding, and so have broken up and passed away, and the place that knew them knows them no more. Again and again it is that which is able to change, which survives and stands stable, while that which is not able to, or not willing, falls in pieces and perishes. Systems, churches, institutions, dogmas, to maintain their ground must needs be supple enough to undergo from time to time some reforming or remodelling in answer to the progress of events, to the pressure of the thought that widens with the process of the suns. Then they may live, but not otherwise; otherwise they are doomed to extinction, and religious faith, which is conserved in consenting to some surrender or amplification of beliefs, is lost often for lack of such consent.

There are things, again, familiar truths, spoken words of the Lord, that wax drearily old

for us, palling on the ear, ceasing to thrill, to impress, to interest; losing any appeal they may once have made, any power they once had to stir or touch the heart, just because we have not essayed to live them, to translate them into action, to have them woven, as it were, into our own temper and spirit for the moulding of our deeds. Hence their insipidity, their staleness. This it is, as one has said, which practically breaks interest in religion—it is a matter of doing and being, and we make it a mere matter of knowing. Were we only essaying more from day to day to carry out the known, to make it the law of our lives and productive of similar growths, what a revolution might take place in our mode of regarding it! Then what earnest word of truth and faith, though it were as ancient as the ages, would not have for us an ever fresh and active significance. "New," wrote the venerable St. John to his children in the faith, "new is the old commandment which ye heard from the beginning, which thing in your case is true because the light has shone," and what could he mean but the quickening, irradiating light shed on it from their habit of endeavour to obey the commandment—that in seeking to live it they found it always new?

But the dew of one's youth! Well! there are retainings of it to be regretted and lamented. We could wish that in the course of years some

men had shaken it off. They should not have kept it, and would not, had they but grown duly, or duly learnt from the experience of life. They are too young for their age. This smug conceit of theirs, this blind assurance and self-confidence, this impetuosity and precipitancy, this intemperate zeal or sanguineness, this want of sweet tolerance and wide charity, were well enough in earlier years, but ought not to be now cleaving to and characterising them. It was the dew of their youth upon them, which the apostle bewailed and reproved in his readers when he wrote, "You have need that one teach you again the rudiments and first principles which are the oracles of God, and instead of being able to digest solid food need to be fed with milk only."

Sometimes a weakness or frailty of youth which we seem to have outgrown and left behind, which during middle life had disappeared, after long intermission makes its appearance again in our latter days. In our latter days there is a recrudescence of it; when the pulse has become fainter, and all the wheels of being slower, we decline somewhat to the poor habit that had been surmounted; the suppressed foible or infirmity of our juvenility survives in us as occasionally with a bodily disease, which, arrested and suspended for a lengthened period, in the feebleness of age breaks out and prevails. Sometimes, on the other hand, a lost tenderness

or grace, a lost sensibility, perhaps a lost faith comes back in the evening of life; overlaid and smothered for awhile in the stress and strain of living, beneath the heat of the chase, the competition and the strife, it is then restored to us, re-awakened in us, and the old man, as with a bolt shot back in the breast, recovers that which had failed from his soul, sees again in the gloaming with the eyes of his youth. Spiritual realities, maybe, that had paled and faded to phantoms, once more steal into his vision, and re-impress themselves; truths that had slept for him awaken; closed heavens open upon him; or, turning from the scepticism and cynicism of maturity, upon the simple creed of his childhood the weary head pillows itself at last. Better this at last, if it may be, than to be sighing with the sigh of one:

"The sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd,
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night wind, down the vast edges drear,
And naked shingles of the world,"

or to end on his note of despair:

"The world which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain,
And we are here as on a darkling plain,
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Better than that, when stooping and tremulous age is left aglow amid the embers with youthful admiration and hope and love.

The dew of one's youth! "Would that we had it upon us," some have said; "something of that golden prime, that precious, bounding vigour, that elasticity before we lost the glory of the form, the lustre of the eye, before we felt our strength"—not our bloom only—but "our strength decay, our limbs wax stiffer, every function less exact, our nerves more loosely strung; when we saw the world as from a height with rapt, prophetic eyes, and heart profoundly stirred." With the close of another year, we count, many of us—for, indeed, the grey-headed among us are many—we count the number of our years, thinking what in their multiplying they have stolen from us, and sav to ourselves we are becoming old, we are no more young, the dew is gone from us. But no, I answer, let us be young still, in spite of the accumulating years, for these need not, should not make us old, whatever limitations for us of some kind and in some direction they may bring. Our youth, too, had its limitations which in our progress we have overstepped, and gone over, to pity with a half-

mocking smile. It was more limited than we are now in the power of calm resignation to the inevitable, or appreciation of the excellencies of others who differ; and I have met, now and again, aged youths, so dull and dim-eyed to the manifold wonder and beauty of the world, so vacant of healthy enthusiasm or fine aspiration, with little or no lively interest in great questions or great matters, in anything much besides trade, pleasure and "Tit-Bits"; sluggishly conservative rather than wildly radical; incapable, apparently, of any high or profound emotion, of any rash, adventurous faith or bold trust in David's sling and stone. *Blasé* creatures, languid, apathetic, cynical, as though they had looked deep into everything and found it hollow; had gone through with everything and found it scarce worth the trouble and pain. These, these are the really old folk, though their years be few.

A man is not old, however hoary and bent, who is conversing, as Emerson says, with what is above him, with the religious eye looking upward, and abandoned the while with delight to the inspirations flowing in from all sides. A man is not old in whom the faculty of imagination is undecayed, who throbs with sympathy as eager and strong as ever for whatsoever is just and lovely and pure and true; whose mind, still responsive and aspiring, is fully open to new

thoughts and new ideas, and cherishes dreams of the ideal; upon whom no weight of custom or of habit lies so heavily that he cannot move out of grooves under the direction of some felt better way, or who carries with him the optimism which, without hiding its face from the dark and ugly facts of existence, can front them smilingly, and sing its song in defiance of them, because of faith in humanity and trust in the divine purpose of the Universe. A man is not old, who is at one with Michael Angelo when, just before he died on the verge of ninety, he carved an allegorical figure, and inscribed on it in large letters, "Still learning," or whose heart echoes Robert Browning, when he sang:

"The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made;
Our times are in His hand
Who saith, 'A whole I planned,
Youth shows but half; trust God; see all, nor be afraid!'"

Grey-headed comrades, do not grow old with age, whatever you do. Determine and study to keep young to the last, under the increasing years and as the shadows fall and lengthen, in all quickness of genial and generous interest, in all sweet impressionableness and sensibility of soul, in the power of deriving joy as you go, and doubling it with thankfulness; in hope cheerful and unashamed for men and for the world; in

the feeling, This is good, all this present order and round of things, this present of attainment and advance upon the best, yet is there better, much better than it to come. In the spirit which says, Though I have failed, I have had the blessing of the effort, and the blessing of the effort made remains within me; in the spirit that says, Let me die, when I die, persuaded of the promises that are not received, with my face turned to the elusive perfection, with my eyes fixed on the ideal truth and beauty—though it be never realised.

GOD VISIBLE IN MEN

"And they glorified God in me."—Gal. i. 24

GOD VISIBLE IN MEN

ST. PAUL is speaking of Hebrew Christians in the Churches of Judæa, recalling how they had welcomed and rejoiced over him at first, when, from a furious persecutor he became suddenly an ardent preacher of the faith; how, on his conversion and during the early days of his Apostleship, they had accepted him reverently and admiringly, as a wonderful example, a wonderful manifestation of divine grace. Since then, to his pain, their feelings towards him had undergone a change; he was no longer regarded by them with the same complacency or approval. There had grown up among them, indeed, a good deal of opposition to him and even of animosity. They found fault with his doctrine, denied or questioned his Apostolic authority, and were endeavouring to dethrone him in the esteem of the Gentile converts, to alienate from him communities he had planted in pagan cities; and, writing now to the Galatians in vindication and assertion of himself against his antagonists, he recalls the very different sentiments that once animated them, the quieter, happier times in which they had united to honour him and had

been full of thanksgiving because of him. Rather heartwounding would have been such backward glances at the warm appreciation and sympathy formerly shown, in contrast with the present hostility and disparagement. But observe what it was specially that he represents them to have felt when, from flaming enmity, he came over to Christ and began labouring devotedly as a missionary of the Cross. Not merely joy in the great gain to the cause of one so richly gifted and endowed, who had been previously so fierce a foe, not merely glad surprise at the remarkable revolution wrought in his ideas and convictions, nor merely admiration at the courage with which he followed and avowed his new convictions and his immense enthusiasm for the Gospel. All this they had surely felt, but, behind and pervading all this, as the deepest thing, he implies, was their worshipping recognition in him of the presence and power of God; that in Saul the tiger of Tarsus transformed into Paul the consecrated Apostle, they had beheld adoringly a fresh expression of God's gracious energy. Many expressions of it had already been encountered and discerned by them, in the order and processes of Nature, in rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, in the growth and unfolding of truth, in saintly lives, in heroic patiences and endurances of the brethren, in motions of their own hearts, in illuminations and instructions they had

received, in the unique character and ministry of Jesus—many were the expressions of it which they had already discerned with happy awe, and now here was another, here the same appearing and working wondrously in a quarter where they had not looked for it. It was with them as when one meets with a new and unexpected illustration of some beautiful law which one has been studying and tracing with interest, or descries in strangers in whom nothing of the kind might have been anticipated, in judgments and choices of theirs, the influence of familiar and beloved principles. Nothing, I think, is more enriching than to have any visible thing made to signify to us invisible things of beauty which it had not before intimated or suggested, to be made alive to a splendour in the sky, to a glory in the flower beyond what mere eyes may see, to which we were insensible ; to awake, like Jacob in the wilderness, to a vision of another world, lustrous and lovelier than the common world about us, or to find, like Moses, in the common bush upon the hillside a vocal, august Presence that had not been there. Nor is there any more beneficent work than to help to enlarge for men, so to speak, the area of the sacred, which was one of the special works of Jesus in His time. Such a revealer of the Divine He was, in the sense of revealing it where it had not been recognised or suspected. For Him, the angels of God not

only descended from above, but ascended also in troops from beneath. Again and again, from tame and beaten paths, from lower parts of the earth, did He uncover and expose the heavenly treasure hid in the field, clothing with an inner and deeper meaning simplest objects of the outward scene, showing, in the round of the sensuous, tokens or adumbrations of the supersensuous. For Him, without the Father not a sparrow fell nor a lily opened to the sun; not here or there was the Father's house, but everywhere, both where He was going and where His disciples would remain. Careful heed must be given to avoid offending one of the little ones playing in the streets, since they were the Father's, and of such was the kingdom of heaven; in the track of each lost sheep followed with patient step the seeking shepherd. How, feeling the pulse of the dissolute and depraved, He heard, secretly beating there, something better than they were, or the promise and earnest of it; and, minister of the circumcision though He was to the end—for He had not time to be more—detected the while and exhibited the divine elements stirring in heathen breasts, calling attention to the Roman soldier's exemplary faith, or pointing out the more excellent spirit of the Samaritan alien. Many were the glimpses which under His teaching the people caught of the God of Israel in strange places, as, indeed, under His

inspiration we have been learning slowly to give wider and wider range to the action of the Father, discovering Him more and more in creeds and religions other than our own, in creeds and religions once deemed wholly devoid of Him and worthy only to be anathematised or contemned, discovering something of Him at the core of darkest errors, in waste places of doubt and denial, lingering still where almost all good has seemed to have faded away and fled, and present in depths of hell. And the more the area of the sacred enlarges for us, extending on all hands, over all, the more, I think, does life become worth living, and the more bravely and finely we are able to live. When, instead of passing to and fro between the sacred and the common, now touching the one and now turning to the other, we are always in conscious contact with the sacred wherever we may be, in every situation and encounter; when all ground is holy ground as the scene of a divine purpose in constant process, as the scene of a constant divine influx and efflux; when all human strengths, skills, gifts are holy, as being God-inspired and God-expressing; when what we designate our necessary worldly labours and pursuits are felt to be our ordained heavenly calling, and the humblest toil required of us the work which the Father has given us to do—then it is good and a great thing to live, and all life grows dignified and sublime.

Again, "they glorified God in me," said St.

Paul. And how much richer would be their inheritance in the Apostle on that account; how much more he would be to them than he could have been at the best had he been in their eyes, to their feeling, simply a brave, faithful, capable creature, had they not been able to regard the brave, faithful, capable creature as God's workmanship and moulded instrument, as having his root and source and sustenance in God. So regarded he would surely command from them so much more of reverence and tenderness. Our interest in certain material things, the measure in which we value and enjoy them, the emotion they stir in us or the treatment they receive from us, is constantly determined or affected by the relations which we see in them. These relations will often suffice to render extremely attractive to us, and clothe with importance, objects which, in themselves, are destitute of attraction or importance, and to which others, who see not in them the relations which we see, may be scornfully indifferent; as when we treasure fondly some small, intrinsically worthless trifle because of the beloved friend to whom it belonged and with whom it is ever associated in our mind, or linger tenderly, reverently, with something of awe, in the poor, bare chamber in which the great poet had lived and dreamt, whose songs have had power to quiet the restless pulse of care; or guard and cherish, and are anxious to save from demolition some

ugly ruin for the sake of brilliant, heroic deeds of the past connected with it. And our interest and inheritance in men will be the greater, the higher we are able to relate them. Let them be related in our faith and conviction to God and immortality, to an Almighty Father and an eternal world, and they will be more to us—more attractive and impressive, more worth considering, loving and ministering to than they would as beings in whom we perceived no more than what is seen and ephemeral, no more than living creatures, beautifully endowed, charming, pathetic, perhaps, but destined very soon to pass into extinction, to be resolved into a mere handful of dust and ashes. In the former case, the smallest of them will be redeemed for us from insignificance, the most contemptible lifted above contempt, the least profitable will seem to claim from us no less zeal for their benefit, and in essaying to serve them, to respond to the appeal of their need, a devotion, an enthusiasm will be possible for us of which otherwise we might hardly be capable. True, there is plenty of benevolence toward men, of delicate consideration for them, of earnest readiness to further and promote their well-being without any belief in their relation to God and immortality. Agnosticism and atheism may be and often are full of noble philanthropy; such philanthropy is by no means confined to those who look upon man as a child—a deathless child of the Eternal, yet to

rank him thus in our mind cannot but tend to affect our work for him, to animate it with a livelier, brighter, hopefuller, stronger spirit, to give it something of loftier tone, can scarcely fail to excite us more powerfully, to set us flowing more intensely. However fervently and eloquently a barrister may plead for a client of whom, while convinced of his innocence and anxious to secure his acquittal, he has the very meanest opinion, a client of whom under similar circumstances he thought very highly would be likely to draw from him still greater fervour and eloquence; striving to do his best for the former, for the latter he could not help doing even better. And exalted views of the human being are conducive to the best behaviour to human beings. We need to love a man first, at least in the sense of rating him highly, that we may feel him most worthy of our love. The higher we are constrained to place him, the more constrained shall we be to abound toward him, and if the particular person be sometimes despicable—so thoroughly despicable, perhaps, that we can scarcely find and acknowledge aught of God in him—let us never lose, therefore, reverence for man, nor be made cynical, scornful or misanthropically inclined. Have we been suffering, as we may have been, at the hands of any, injustice and dishonest treatment; have any in whom we have trusted, wretchedly deceived us, revealing a hollowness, an unworthiness that threatened to embitter us; have we been

encountering of late several instances of odious conduct or detestable selfishness—let no such experiences ever prevail to weaken our faith in man, to render us sceptical or suspicious, and, instead of leaning the ear to drink in the gossip that may be going on around us, concerning some people's littlenesses and foibles, instead of giving ourselves to be interested in stories to their disadvantage or in noting and remarking on what they may exhibit of infirmity, of petty and paltry spirit, and coming thus—as we should—to appraise them unfairly, to think of them more meanly than they deserve, and to view mankind through the blurring mist of their faults and imperfections, instead of this, be it ours to seek to hear, rather, of people's good points and redeeming features, to get round, if the first view be ugly, to the other and better side of them, round from the bleak, scarred northern side of the hill to the southern side of pleasanter aspect, turning from what may be ridiculous or shabby in them to what may be alongside thereof of fine or comely; not lingering before what would excite sneering or satire, but passing on quickly to dwell before what can be admired, of which there will always be something, and under the depressing influence of contact at times, perhaps, with much that is sordid and base, seeking an analeptic, a restorative, in the contemplation or remembrance of deeds that are noble, of lives that are lovely or

lofty, in enumerating to ourselves the saints and heroes of whom we have heard or read, the splendid characters, the beautiful souls whom we have known and know in many a quiet home, on many a lowly stage; sojourning awhile among the grand things, the strong, the charming things of the sons of men, to come back with our faith in and reverence for humanity renewed; avoiding whatever would tend to impair that faith or diminish that reverence, studious to preserve within us the ability to glorify God in man, that we may be all the readier and heartier and stronger in the service of man. Nor, indeed, is he, in any instance, a mean creature, however meanly, often, he may act or show. In the vulgarest or the coarsest, in the most unattractive or repulsive, hide, frequently, streaks of magnanimity, veins of delicate feeling, romances of love and unselfish devotion, heroic patiences and endurances; could we but see and understand all that belongs to them we might find in them more admirable things than we dream of, something worthy of worship, something akin to the Divine, and no other than true is that which one has ventured to declare, that "we touch heaven whenever we lay our hand on a human soul."

Yes, "Numen in est"—as, when passing the sacred grove, or the solemn ilex wood, the ancient Roman was wont to whisper with awe—"Numen in est"—God is in there.

THE ASCENSION

"Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things."—Ephesians i. 9, 10.

THE ASCENSION

LAST Thursday, you know, Holy Thursday so-called, was Ascension Day, one of the great annual festivals of the Christian Church, held, since the beginning of the fourth century, in commemoration of the Ascension of Jesus Christ to heaven, after His resurrection from the dead as recorded in the Gospel story by those His devoted followers who, revived from the crushing blow they had suffered, became blissfully assured of it. It was their declaration that they had beheld Him taken up and received into heaven. And what now did they mean by that? What really was the actual firm belief, the moral certainty, expressed in these terms, in this form of words? What, to them, was the ascension of the Christ that died, of which they were so convinced, so profoundly convinced that they said, "We saw Him go up, rising from below to the skies"? To answer that question we need to understand and consider what their ideas were regarding the dead. In common with all Jews of the time their thought with regard to them was that in passing away they had descended into Sheol or Hades, a region in the bowels of the

earth, a dim underworld, where they dwelt imprisoned, with folded hands, silent and inactive, no more ranging abroad, no more throbbing with device or desire; here, in their conception, languished as pale shadows alike the just and the unjust, the evil and the good. Heaven was the abode of Jehovah and His angels only; of mortals who had departed hence none were gone thither, not even the just or the good. They, with all others, were down in the subterranean realm of Sheol or Hades, shut in and still. That Jesus had ascended would have meant then for His disciples that, having shared the fate of all who died, He had been delivered from it, instead of remaining in confinement with them, had been released to live at large and on high, more vitally and more abundantly than during the days of His flesh. The Jesus of whom, since His death, they had had, once and again, comforting visions, was for them no longer in the dim underworld, silent and inactive, but had escaped, and was exalted above it, to celestial heights of being. This was the conviction borne in upon them when they had recovered from the shock of His crucifixion, and what had seemed to their despair the doleful ending of all. They could not entertain the thought that He, their great Master, was left in the sombre abyss a powerless and half lifeless shadow, but were somehow indubitably sure that

He had risen from thence and mounted to some fuller and grander existence, and it was to them as though they had beheld Him taken up. So, in such pictorial phrase, they uttered the persuasion and certitude of their soul, the persuasion and certitude that He, who in the later words of St. Paul "came to the lower parts of the earth," born into the world in a mean condition, drawing His first breath in a stable, enjoying His first sleep in a manger, as a man, earning His bread in the sweat of His brow with axe and hammer; who, while foxes had holes and birds of the air nests, had not where to lay His head; whom reproach, scorn and contumely followed like a dark shadow; whom persecution accused, calumniated, scourged and doomed to ignominious torture and a felon's end—that He was living now in transcendent freedom and amplitude, "the same Jesus," as St. Paul wrote later on, the very same whom they had consorted with, with whom they had sailed the lake and strolled in summer fields, who had compassion on the multitude, who fed the hungry, relieved the afflicted, calmed the demoniac, healed the leper, was touched with the feeling of men's infirmities, and to whom no form of human misery appealed in vain—the same Jesus, abiding beyond sight, emancipated from the limitations and the restrictions of mortality, with His distinctive manhood persisting, but refined and dignified,

with all that He was, in distinctive quality and feature, persisting, but expanded and raised to a higher pitch. And this belief, this conviction of theirs—what it represented of triumph won by the vanished Master over their rooted ideas and prepossessions, and the dark despair to which His death had at first reduced them! What an impression it must have been that He made on them in their intercourse with Him, as One of surpassing greatness and grace; what the uniqueness of His personality and its effects upon them, to have created in them this belief and conviction in spite of all, and contrary to opposing influences! It was a miracle wrought in them, and a miracle that could only have been wrought by the force of His sublime personality, which compelled them to feel that such as He, the Jesus whom they knew, must needs be surviving, not cooped in Sheol, etiolated, pale and wan, but in a state of being augmented and enhanced. And as they went on their way, the serene confidence that it was so would be increased and deepened in them by what they experienced in themselves and witnessed around them. For how strangely uplifted in soul and inspired with ever fresh inspiration they were; how strengthened with might in the inner man, as they had not been, and how wondrously was His gospel, the gospel they bore with them, working in the world, an ever-extending power of salvation, as it had

not been; and was it not He Himself, who from above was thus acting on them, and on the world through them? Here, it would seem to them, were daily evidences of His continued existence in greater effluence and potency than before, that He had ascended to be with them more richly, and to flow abroad more redeemingly. There was that in their heart which might almost have been expressed in Tennyson's somewhat extravagant lines to his beloved dead:

"Dear friend, far off, my lost desire,
So far, so near in woe and weal;

"Dear heavenly friend that canst not die,
Mine, mine, for ever, ever mine;

"Strange friend, past, present and to be;
Loved deeplier, darklier understood;
Behold, I dream a dream of good,
And mingle all the world with thee.

"Thy voice is on the rolling air;
I hear thee where the waters run;
Thou standest in the rising sun,
And in the setting thou art fair."

And, for myself, I cannot but think of the holy dead, the nobly bent and consecrated who have died, men of high aim and generous devotion who rejoiced to be expended in ministry—I cannot but think of such as ascended to live somewhere a life of greater freedom and larger scope; of greater freedom, in respect to what hampered and trammelled them here; of larger scope for

their cultured energies and the activities they loved; with all that they were of moral and spiritual worth, of excellent quality, of aptitude and strength for service, not only conserved but advanced, and blooming to fine and finer profit otherwhere; with all that they were of good and beneficent capacity heightened, like early morning light to lustrous noon, or incipient spring verdure to midsummer plenitude.

But "he who to our faith has ascended," adds the Apostle, "what is it but that he first descended?" That had to be first, in order to this. Not without descending as He did could He have thus ascended; the present exaltation has ensued from what He underwent down here, perfected now, by the things which He suffered, able now to save so grandly, to the uttermost, because here He could not save Himself, but was willing and content to endure all in seeking to save. And it is always thus. There is no crown of glory to be gained except by way of the Cross; no hill of fine attainment to be reached, except across the intervening valley of some hardship and more or less painful striving; only at the cost of having denied themselves have any come to possess themselves; only at the cost of some losing of life can the more life and fuller be realised.

So many have missed the ampler of which they dreamt, perhaps, and which might have been

theirs to enjoy, because they could not be resigned or determined to undergo the straitening, the undergoing of which was essential for it; have missed the felicity of the triumph set before them to be won, because they shrank from or failed to accept the necessary conflict, to wage the warfare demanded. They, who in any true sense have ascended, have always first descended. The great master of the art who has attained to work his work with such spacious facility and ease, to execute so freely and so finely, to the admiration and wonder of the 'prentice in the art,—what is it but that he had descended in hard plodding endeavour, in strenuous application, in long painful struggle to do, binding himself to live laborious days? The 'prentice envies his facility and ease, his splendid mastery, but how much it means withal of prior slow drudgery and anxious toil. The poet who sings so inspiringly, kindling and piercing a thousand hearts with his exquisite strains, what is it but that he had learnt in suffering what he breathes in song?

> "Weep not over poet's wrong,
> Mourn not his mischances,
> Sorrow is the birth of song
> And of gentle fancies."

Or there is one with whom the practice of all virtue has come to be, for the most part, spontaneous, flowing from him, so to speak, like

the liquid notes rom the throat of a bird, to whom it is scarcely a task to do all good and noble things, who, it seems, might almost say with Nature:

> "There is no effort on my brow,
> I do not strive, I do not weep,
> I rush with the swift spheres, and glow
> In joy, and when I will, I sleep;"

and what is it but that he has attained to this by dint of previous labour, that behind it lies a period during which he had studied and laboured to be virtuous, and has learnt at length to do fluently and well-nigh instinctively, from habit slowly formed with successive strivings to do against contrary inclinations and impulse; that only from having striven again and again to *walk* in the way of the commandment, and often with aching and stumbling feet, is he now fleetly *running* therein. Or here is one gifted with a great capacity of sympathy, sympathy with others' sorrows and woes, quick to be touched with the feeling of them, able to understand readily and to enter fully into burdens of the heavy-laden, a notable burden-bearer, and delicately skilled in comforting the mourners; and what is it but that he has borne upon him the yoke of suffering, has been down once and again in depths of affliction, and known what it is to groan under the weight of many a trial? There is no heart keenly sensitive to others'

trouble or pain that has not been itself smitten and stricken; no Barnabas, no famous son of consolation, most apt in ministering solace or in helping to heal with the laying on of his hands the wounded spirit, wounded by the slings and arrows of calamity, who has not himself passed through the furnace, and been baptised with some baptism of fire; as there is no patient, considerate, intuitively comprehending and succouring dealer with religiously doubting, questioning, desponding or bewildered souls, souls wandering in the wilderness of lost faith and hope, or dark denial, who has not himself at some time or another wandered for a while in that same wilderness, until he fought and found his way out of it. And they who have ascended to some vision of spiritual realities which they had not, or to some clearer vision than they had, to see these no longer pale, dim and phantom-like, but shining and lustrous—has it not been often that they had descended into some gulf of sorrow, some night of weeping, and from thence have risen to behold with "eyes which painful tears have served to wash and clarify for sight"? Is it not the case, moreover, with new truth borne into the world in the vision of some seer, in the thought of some original mind, which is destined, sooner or later, to go forth abroad and impress itself far and wide; is it not the case with new ideas conceived and beginning to be uttered,

which are destined, sooner or later, to spread and win general entertainment, that they rarely ascend to obtain their dominion without having descended, in being treated with contempt for a while, scorned, ridiculed, regarded disdainfully, with "silent smiles of slow disparagement"; the many hiding their faces from them, seeing in them neither form nor comeliness and no beauty that they should desire them, and then yet further descending to be withstood and perhaps temporarily overborne and smothered by assaulting prejudice, by various hostile airs and influences; running the gauntlet of much opposition—that only so have they come at last to prevail and conquer, not entering into their glory until they have thus suffered, having had to endure baffling resistance, with something of obloquy, with something of shame and spitting, before they commanded homage and became enthroned. Yes, however sure and determined their ultimate ascension, some such descent must e'en precede it, and those who are harbouring and uttering them must be content to wait with patience and courage for their triumphant establishment, while they are sustaining the weight of that cross which Truth, as one has said, is ever doomed to bear, and on which alone it finally sways and blesses the world.

THE CHRIST BEFORE AND BEYOND CHRIST

"That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."—John i. 9.

"And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them; and that Rock was Christ."—1 Cor. x. 4.

THE CHRIST BEFORE AND BEYOND CHRIST

THE Apostles of the New Testament were always representing the Christ whom they preached, as a manifestation ; not as one whose advent among them was his first beginning, but as the drawing near and shining forth of One who *had* been before. They saw in Him an emergence of what existed prior to their seeing ; the emergence of a hidden glory, as when the moon glides into sight from behind a cloud, or the sun streams up over the eastern hills.

And where had the Christ of their proclaiming been concealed ? Whence did He come ? Why, He came from God, you will reply ; His dwelling had been in the bosom of the eternal Father. Most true, but does that express all the fact, is that all that should be said ? We speak often as though it were ; as though, until the spirit of grace and truth and love that shone upon us from the face of Jesus *appeared* in Him, it had been shut up closely in celestial seclusion ; as though, during the many ages of human history that preceded its descent in the flesh, on the hills of Judæa, it had remained apart and far off from us in the depths of Heaven. Yet, being what it was, how impossible that such should have been the case.

Look at the Divine Son in the sweet Nazarene — palpitating with philanthropic pity and zeal, pouring Himself out daily for men, eagerly taking their griefs and carrying their sicknesses, consumed with yearnings and labours in their cause; and can you imagine that He had never sought them, and walked with them, and ministered to them *before;* had never before been attracted and impelled to seek to help them in their needs, that until then He had lived retired and aloof from them without an effort to influence or inspire? Could He have done so? Could he have restrained Himself from visiting them and breathing on them through all the previous periods of their want and darkness, to be all at once thus active and devoted on their behalf? No! the Word of the Infinite that stole down into our midst eighteen centuries ago, to communicate freely of its fulness, must have been with us in some kind of presence and operation antecedently, must have been unable to avoid dealing with us from the first origin of things; from the very first origin of things its "*delights had been with the sons of men.*"

To the question then—where did Christ issue from at His manifestation?—my answer is, from *us* as well as from God, from the ends of the *earth* as well as from the sanctuary of Eternity, and such evidently would have been the answer both of St. John and of St. Paul. "*That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh*

into the world." "*And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual rock that followed them : and that rock was Christ.*"

Yes, He who was made visible in our sphere at a certain time, was already in our sphere. He came to us, not only from the great God above us, but from among us and within us. He came from hiding in the wilderness with the ancient Israelites, from hidings with Buddhists and Fire-worshippers, with idolaters and sacrificers to demons, and from wherever human creatures had learnt to dream or kneel. He came from behind the formalisms and hypocrisies of the Pharisees who derided Him, and from the innermost hearts of publicans and harlots who crowded to hear Him. The Christ in the holy child of Bethlehem was no stranger here, He was coming to His own ; He had consorted and communed with men long ere He began to show Himself to them, had arrived much earlier than His Advent. While as yet angelic sympathy had not overflowed in song upon the shepherds' ears, nor the midnight sky flamed with the Magi's signal star, He was here, silently pervading, imperceptibly at work, and there was neither speech nor language where, without observation, He was not.

His revealment indeed, if the commencing of a new order of things, was also the issuing from an old order ; if the root and foundation of fresh divine movements, was also the due flowering

outwardly of divine movements that had been going on in secret. He came thus, at length, because He had *been* coming in other, subtler ways, and in the fulness of His hidden pulsings must now break forth. He was a descent, and yet equally an unfolding and intervention, and yet as truly an eruption.

"The time was ripe for Him," we are wont to say; and how ripe but in the widespread sense of want and emptiness, in the soul-hunger and wistful expectancy, in the blind guesses and aspirations of mankind, of which He was the invisible impulse and source. He had been working in men, until that which He had wrought in them demanded His manifestation to them. Having acted upon them to the extent to which they were capable of being acted upon by Him, from *within*, He gathers and collects Himself from His dispersion in inward parts, to stand condensed and shaped before them. The Christ *in* them to the utmost of their receptivity becomes at last the Christ *outside* them, to give them more. All things tend and press towards the surface; "*there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.*" The anti-Christ, whom the Holy Apostle described, huge and ugly in the distance, and of whom he warned the Thessalonian Church, was to be the ultimate objectiveness of what, according to his vision, had begun even then to stir at the heart, and mix with the lifeblood, of Christendom.

Every diffused spirit finds sooner or later some embodiment, and presents itself embodied to those in whose breasts it has been floating; and in process of time the Christ, who had been a measure of illumination in all souls, and an unseen inspiration with Moses and his people in the desert—in process of time, *He* finds and takes on a body. "*A body hast thou prepared me.*" He was the incarnation of the living word that had breathed among us, and whispered within us, from the beginning. Everywhere there had been some religious idea and emotion, some groping and craving after more life and ampler, some impress of God, Right, Duty, some spiritual pensiveness and unrest, some inward glimmerings of divine truth; and wherever these things were, there was Christ. He was at the bottom of it. It was *He*, striving to insinuate Himself; *He*, insinuating into men what He could, according to their receptiveness and capacity; entering into and guiding them, according to their several degrees of openness. In multitudes He could make but little way; they were too sensual, too low, or too undeveloped, to admit much of Him; His light paled and flickered, grew sickly-hued and produced strange illusions in their atmosphere; His spirit was twisted and distorted by their narrowness, or engulfed and lost in the waste of their impurity; His voice was broken into indistinct and scattered murmurs, murmurs mingling confusedly with the tumult of their own

rude passions and mean imaginations; and in *all*, even the best, He was more or less limited, hindered and perverted.

But however full of error their religious thoughts and moral ideas, there was always something of Him in them, something of Him underlying and running through them; and if ever they were wholly wrong or base, He was still at least the divine necessity in their breasts of religious thoughts and moral ideas, the fountain of the impulse that led to them. Whatever true light any man had was of His shining. Whatever grains of eternal truth the Hebrew fugitives acquired and bore along with them, in the midst of ignorances and superstitions, were of *His* imparting who in secret followed them. He was touching and moving all souls with His presence, sighing and throbbing in the depths of all minds; and Jesus of Nazareth was His eventual appearance, *outwardly*, the bursting upon them, the coming to meet them, of Him who had been among them and in them. Was not this the mystery, of which St. Paul wrote, as the mystery that had "*been hid for ages and generations, but was now made manifest to the saints, to whom God would make known*," if possible, the riches of its glory among the heathen, even Christ *in* them, the hope of glory? As though he had said, "the Christ whom I preach to them, is already *in* them, and the fact, hitherto concealed, but at length assured to us who believe, is the hope of their

redemption, the fact namely, that I am setting before them One, whom they have had and still have working in them."

This, I conceive, is what we want to understand and recognise—that you can carry Christ nowhere where He is not; that He is with men prior to their hearing of Him from our lips; that in bringing Him to them, we are but bringing to them the incarnate plenitude and perfection of their own truest inspirations and best feelings, of the divine light that twinkles, and the divine spirit that struggles within them, under and through all that is false or bad. Were I a missionary to any people sunk in darkness outside Christendom, my first object and endeavour would be to make acquaintance reverently with their religion, to ascertain their moral and spiritual whereabouts; and then I would introduce Christ to them as the revelation of Him who had been in their hearts all along, seeking to teach and direct them, whose influence it was that had constrained them to look up and wish and try to worship, who had breathed into them the sentiments and aspirations out of which their beliefs and sacred ceremonies had grown, under whom they had caught such and such glimpses of real truth, apparent or indicated, here and there in their creed and ritual. "And now behold Him," I should say, "the Good Spirit who has been among you and within you, unseen; behold Him come to tell you all things,

to show you plainly of the Father; to supplement your hitherto imperfect reception of Him, and to correct you where hitherto you have misconstrued Him; behold Him coming to 'His own' to explain and expound Himself, and to lead them on, by His open manifestation, to the clearer knowledge and higher life He has been waiting to give them." That is how I should preach to the heathen.

According to St. Paul and St. John, He is *in* men, enlightening and inspiring them, somewhat, before ever He is preached to them; and He *appears* in due season, to appeal to His own presence and pulsation *in* them, to liberate and educe it, to make it the ground and foothold from whence to act upon them. My trust and confidence in displaying Him to the ignorant and depraved would be, that there is that much of Him in them all, however entangled and overlaid, which the exhibition of Him is calculated to rouse and free, and which is capable of appreciating and receiving Him.

You will remember, how, while proclaiming Himself "*The Light of the World*," He spoke at the same time of the "light" *in* those to whom He came, and implied that it should enable them to recognise and embrace Him, exhorting them also, with solemn earnestness, to give heed to guard and preserve it, since if it were suffered to become darkness, to degenerate

and die out, what then could be done for them; *then*, in spite of the brightest outward shining, how profound would be their darkness!

There were those, in His day as in ours, who had well nigh stifled the Christ in them, in whom He had been resisted and corrupted until the light was almost ready to expire; and it is not alone what we have spread *before* us of the Divine that is important, but what of the Divine we have alive and nourished *within* us. The Christ *in* us is the hope of glory, yet He is manifested to seek and save the lost—the lost Christ in profane souls—with His voice to recover and revive and summon it forth from its grave. And mark the *depth* at which He is represented as lying in our midst—"*the light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world*," and "*the spiritual rock that followed the Israelites;*" not merely with us and in us, but the *undermost* with us, and the *first* in us; One who is at the back of all, and from whom all start. The ground of every religion, blundering and degraded as it may be, is Christ. Behind all the mistaken, wistful dreams and guessings and aspirings of Humanity, Christ hides. That which is immediately before you may be unsatisfactory and undivine enough, but if you can only penetrate and descend into it you will come, sooner or later, upon signs and traces of Him. Every theosophic error has something true at the root of it, and it

is by digging down thereto and unfolding and cultivating the buried bit of the true, that the false growth will be best reduced and dispersed. There is always a danger in rushing to attack the latter, lest your blows should crush or wound at the same time the good thing that underlies it. With its fierce onslaughts upon heresies, orthodox zeal has contributed to produce, often, a dreary vacuum of infidelity. In smiting recklessly at ugly and baneful superstitions, one may run the risk of lacerating sweet faith. The anti-Christ that excites your hostility does, here and there, rest upon and involve, you may be sure, some particle of Christ; instead, therefore, of flying furiously at the face of him, quietly search through him for that Christ particle, that it may not be destroyed with the wicked; and in drawing it out and building with it, you will be gradually and certainly undermining your anti-Christ and securing his downfall. We should look ever for the sparks of truth that lie embedded in the falsest creed, and may reckon confidently on providing for its extinction, by disengaging and fanning these.

But further, He who is behind all religious ideas and expressions, however various, is also first and fundamental in individual souls. We all *start* from Him—widely as we may swerve and stray from Him, and much as we may need after a while to be brought back to Him—we all *start* from Him. "*The light of every one coming into*

the world," He is always, wherever else He may be wanting, in the fresh-born child. Of whom did He say, during His earthly ministry, "*Suffer them to come to Me, for of such is the Kingdom of Heaven*," but of little children? They might grow up, to be found very remote from it, to have the light in them turned to darkness, to be utter aliens and strangers; but, as yet, the Kingdom of Heaven was rudimentally lodged within them. In such as these, says Christ, it is sown; out of such as these it rises and expands; in whomsoever among you it has declined, in whomsoever it is withered and lost, in *them* it springs fresh, and is ready to open toward fulfilment.

Thus you see, according to the explicit teaching of the Lord Jesus, we set out, not from ruin but from redemption, *not* from Adam's curse, but from the gift and grace of the Son of God, *not* undone, but restored; our real foundation—whatever we may learn to build that is contrary and contradictory—our real foundation *not* in mire of sin and shame, but in Christ, the possibility and "*the hope of glory, honour, immortality and eternal life.*"

He is born with us and in us, at the back of all else, to the end that we may be born, and more and more deeply, into Him. We begin, not with the devil, however we may *come* to him, nor with ourselves merely, but with Him, to the end that He may be perfected in us; and if you mean by your infant baptism, simply a declaratory

rite, in which this is announced and borne witness to, I must e'en acknowledge its appropriateness and beauty. But oh, fathers and mothers, know and consider what it is that looks at you out of the eyes of your little ones, as you hold them in your arms. Do you see something of yourselves reflected there, some shadow or prophecy of your own figure? But there is something behind all that; it is the Christ that looks at you out of the depths of those smiling eyes, saying, if you will hear, "Lo! here am I, folded and waiting within; be careful of me, foster and educate me, encourage and elicit me for your child's salvation." But alas! sirs and good women, how often in Christ's name have parents unwittingly arrested and thwarted the Christ in their children's breasts, and driven Him thence. He *was* there, to begin with, for "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven;" but with the false training, begotten of false views, they have miserably succeeded in prevailing against Him. He is the light of everyone coming into the world. Let us beware of dulling, neglecting or ignoring this inner light, and let this be our hope, for the future alike of individuals and of the race; that the Christ who has appeared to us in the midst of the ages, as the redeeming power from Heaven, is also underneath all, and within all, the fundamental inspiration of the universal religious soul, and the "*beginning of the creation of God.*"

IN MEMORIAM: KING EDWARD VII

"Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the Lord from his place. . . . So the spirit lifted me up and took me away. . . . Then I came to them of the captivity that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days . . . Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine house."—Ezekiel iii. 12, 14, 15, 24.

IN MEMORIAM: KING EDWARD VII

Such, according to his own account, were Ezekiel's several experiences at the time of his call to the prophet's office. He became possessed with a spirit, a spirit that did with him what it would, controlling and constraining him as it would, in different ways, with different action on him, moving him now thus and now thus, while he had no power to resist, and could only do or go as he was moved, like an autumn leaf, helplessly driven by the wind, hither and thither, one moment carried aloft, and the next borne down to the ground. It first lifted him up to the height of rapture, to a kind of ecstasy, in which he heard the sound of a great rushing, a rush of mighty, majestic voices, proclaiming the glory of the Lord round about him, and bidding him behold it. Then, presently, on a sudden, it took him away from the glory, and sank him to deep sadness and grief, in which state he sat seven days, not only mourning, but bitterly complaining, painfully distraught and bewildered. Then, after a while, it raised him to his feet, and swept him back to his house, to be shut in there with homely, ordinary affairs, from all with which he had been ravished or oppressed. So variously was

he possessed; even, indeed, as we are, having our moments of inward exaltation or enlarging, and of inward downcasting or straitening; of optimistic brightness, and pessimistic gloom; suffering a sea of change from buoyant to melancholy, and from melancholy to buoyant mood—sometimes we can scarcely tell why—why we are not in feeling to-day as we were yesterday, but quite the reverse, or that all outward things wear for us such a different aspect, that hope has given place to despondency, or despondency to hope; now, maybe, like Robert Browning, we

> "find earth not grey, but rosy,
> Heaven not grim, but fair of hue,
> Do we stoop? We pluck a posy,
> Do we stand and stare? All's blue!"

and anon, in the very same field, there is for us no posy to be plucked, and earth to our view is wholly grey, and heaven grim. Now our vision is of the signs that are promising, full of cheering promise for the great movement, the great cause, and anon, of none but those that are threatening or disconcerting. Or, from seeing, with charmed eyes, all the wonder and beauty of the world, we pass to seeing with weary eyes all its manifold travail and misery; from a vivid sense of the good that abounds on every side, to a depressing, distressful sense of the abounding evil; from the sense of "a presence which disturbs us with the joy of elevated thoughts" to a disturbing sense

of the sad music of humanity, or of the dark, insoluble mystery that overshadows all.

But when, from beholding the glory of the Lord in His place, from hearing the rush of voices celestial and the noise of the seraphic wings, Ezekiel came among the moaning captives who dwelt by the river of Chebar, he sat, not only sorrowful, he says, but "astonished," or, rather, distracted and dismayed, by what he saw, that these of the chosen people should have been left by Providence to suffer thus. And events there are, now and again, which affect us similarly; such, for instance, as the great grievous calamity which has befallen the nation in the sudden snatching away from his high post of one who may be said to have been the kingliest of kings; whose removal, at a time, at a juncture, when he could least have been spared and was most needed, is felt, universally, to be a loss unspeakable. It dismayed us that he should have been struck down thus prematurely, and just now, and while moved to exclaim at the cruel inconsiderateness of death, it brought home to us also, forcibly, the humiliating truth that all the glory of man is as the flower of the grass which withereth, leaving us saying to ourselves, under a fresh, keen impression of the truth:

"The glories of our birth and state
Are shadows, not substantial things;
There is no armour against fate,
Death lays his icy hand on Kings;

Sceptre and crown
Must tumble down,
And in the dust be equal made
With the poor crooked scythe and spade."

This we know, of course, well enough, but on occasions, as now, it is flashed upon us piercingly, and what we have always known and acknowledged we feel acutely, with something, perhaps, of bitterness, like the bitterness which, in the heat of his spirit, Ezekiel felt by the river of Chebar. But he was not allowed to linger there long, bowed with grief. Presently, while mourning and lamenting, he was borne from thence and made to stand upon his feet, raised from his prostration to be erect again, his head lifted above the big wave of sorrow that had whelmed and engulfed him. Of such recovery we have had experience, recovery under some influence or other from heavy sadness, from dark, despairing or disconsolate mood. Something has touched and acted on us restoringly, a passage in a book read, perhaps, or converse with a friend who knew how to speak a word in season has brought us gradually to a calmer mind, set us gradually in a happier frame; we have seen things in a new light, and grown strong to shake off the weight that weighed us down, have been reanimated and reinspirited, braced to stand upright from bending, in our lot, to accept bravely the severe, the inevitable, that had dishevelled and distressed; other thoughts and reflections have come to brighten or nerve, and "Richard was himself again."

So let it be with us now, in our mourning and lamentation over the death of one whose death has deprived us of a fine sagacity, a wise statesmanship, a potency for good in our midst that we could ill afford to lose; for, however he may be missed in council, and will surely be, however unpropitious and disadvantageous for the nation his removal from the scene, whatever may have been his actual worth and value to the commonwealth, it was not *essential* to its interests that he should remain. No man, not even the greatest, the wisest, the best, is ever essential. We may say to ourselves, dolefully, as has sometimes been said at his departure, What shall we do? What will become of the movement, the cause, now he is gone who was such a quickening spirit, such a sustaining force? But he departs, and it does not languish and fail, mighty and dominant factor though he was; the individual, the supreme individual goes, and the world goes on unchecked towards its goal; it "marches still prospering, not through his presence; songs still inspire it, not from his lyre," deeds continue to be done while he sleeps from doing, and the largest place left vacant comes to be filled; the hero perishes, but heroes are bound to succeed him; the eyes of the eminent seer are closed and we sorely miss his visions, but after him other eyes are opened to see, and their visions suffice to carry us on. King Edward, endued with the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might,

is gone, but whatever the loss, we shall move forward in progress, shall settle our controversies and solve our problems and beat our music out, without him.

And not seldom the severest loss brings with it something of subtle gain. The brave, the beloved, the true-hearted, who have vanished from beside us, are often given back to us with a deeper impression upon us of their excellence and worth than we had while they were with us, though speaking with us on earth no more, silently touching and stirring us as they did not then.

So it was emphatically in the case of Jesus, who, having passed away, came to His Apostles and wrought in them more quickeningly, to finer issues, than when He was alive. So the effect of particular words and counsels of the dead father or mother is often greater in their children than at the time when the counsels and words were spoken, or all that they were of goodness and grace is more movingly felt out of the darkness that has swallowed them and shines more vividly.

> "Now, dearest, that thy brows are cold
> I see thee what thou art, and know
> Thy likeness to the wise below,
> Thy kindred with the great of old."

The noble or sweet features of the familiar figure which the grave has hidden from sight are often revealed to us as they had not been; not until the beautiful life has ended is all its beauty fully or most clearly discerned, and it is as though

such an one had been among us, and we knew it not. The prophet, the teacher, however revered, the friend, however cherished, may need sometimes to die that he may show himself to us and live in us more abundantly.

Or, is it that we are idealising him, seeing him when he is no longer seen, rather more majestic in aspect than he actually was? It may be so, but we, at all events, are the richer in ourselves for the idealising. And if the late beloved King, in being justly mourned, as he is, be somewhat idealised under the canonising influence of death, it is well; while in death what he really was for admiration, which was much, is being more clearly recognised and more fully appreciated with a general heart-stir and warmth of feeling—which is our gain, for we live by admiration as well as by faith and hope. And it may be that in the nation's lingering remembrance and review of his great qualities, something will be added for us to their beneficent influence.

But the spirit—the spirit lifted me up, said Ezekiel. And what was it that lifted King Edward as he was lifted to his height of deserved popularity, of honour and praise, of enthronement in the affections of his people, and of power for good at home and abroad? What, mainly, but his possession with a spirit—a spirit, one may say, especially, of devotion to duty and of wide sympathy. Devotion to duty characterised him from the beginning to the end of his reign, devotion to the high, onerous duties of his exalted office—these

were clearly recognised by him, and, recognised, were his first supreme consideration. Whatever the pleasures he took, the sports and pastimes he enjoyed, nothing was ever allowed to interfere with the diligent and faithful discharge of these. And as he lived he died, the ruling passion strong in death; to the very last, with fast failing strength, and painful gasps for breath, he was found bent upon attending to them as long as possible, struggling to go on with his work, to do his duty. So he passed away, a noble example of royal loyalty, sustained and unflinching.

> "Great gifts should be worn like a crown befitting,
> And not like gems in a beggar's hands,
> But the toil must be constant and unremitting
> That lifts up the King to the crown's demands."

and with such toil he was lifted. When a certain French Bishop was urged by his friends to take one day in the week for recreation from clerical business, he is said to have replied: "Yes, with all my heart, if only you can point out to me a day in which I am not a Bishop." That was something of the spirit which animated our late sovereign, conjoined with which was a spirit of sympathy, of wide human sympathy, that gave him his quick understanding and keen sensibility in regard to the different interests or feelings of those about him, and of all sorts and conditions of men; that made him invariably, involuntarily courteous, gracious, considerate, and fitly responsive, given, on all occasions, in all relations,

as has often been said, to say and do just the right thing, and rendered him what all who came in contact with him acknowledged him to be—a charming personality. It made him again and again intuitively wise, and, amidst the pomp and pageantry of regal state, one of the most human of men. A fine man, in a word, as well as a kingly king,

"He has raised the lovers' standard by his loyalty and faith;
He has shown how virile manhood may keep free from scandal's breath;
He has gazed, with trust unshaken, in the awful face of Death;
In the mighty march of progress he has sought to do his best.
Let his enemies be silent, as we lay him down to rest,
And may God assuage the anguish of one suffering woman's breast."

And now, when they shall have borne him at length in solemn, stately procession to the tomb, and left him lying there, shut in with his ancestors; from all the gloom and sorrow in which for a while his death has plunged us, let us go back to our house, as from his season of mourning and lamenting by the river of Chebar Ezekiel went back to his; to the house of our country and commonwealth, to be shut in there by the Spirit. A spirit of renewed devotion to duty, and re-quickened sympathy—devotion to our duty as British citizens, members of a great kingdom and Empire, and sympathy, lively and active, with all that may conduce to the best health and well-being of the whole, with all that may contribute

in any way toward making this England of ours a yet fairer and happier land, and the kingdom and Empire a more righteous and beneficent potency in the world; seeking, each of us, to stand upright worthily and nobly in his lot, each cherishing the fear of God, and cultivating love of the brotherhood, fearing Him in submission and fidelity to the highest laws revealed to us, and loving ourselves not first, but last.

"Love ourselves last, and we shall grow in spirit
To see, to hear, to know and understand;
The message of the stars, lo, we shall hear it,
And all true peace shall be at our command."

PRAYERS

PRAYERS

O God, from Whom we have grown into the thought and sense of Thee, Whom we know not and yet know, Whom we find not in any searching but are possessed by, Whom we cannot reach, and from Whom we can in nowise free ourselves, Whom we seek to comprehend in words and Thou escapest us—we worship Thee, awed and humbled by Thy inscrutable mystery, and constrained to believe in Thy infinite goodness. We worship Thee, not with the idea of serving or pleasing Thee thus, but as the one Divine reality behind and in all, on which all depends and is variously expressing; as the transcendence of the greatest and the best of which we can conceive, and because of Whom we are not content with what we see or with what we are and do, but must needs be anticipating and aiming at something beyond; must yet be imagining in our finest lands another country and a heavenly; because of Whom we are ever learning and attaining through our ignorance and failure, while "with confused noise and garments rolled in blood," the battle between good and evil, between light and darkness, persists and ceases not. We worship

Thee as the hidden fountain of all wisdom and truth, of all might and grace, of all justice and love, from Whom it is that we are visited with purifying visions and impulses amidst our disorders, and are not without strength in our weakness nor without sight in our dimness; from Whom it is that there are two creatures in us, always at variance, out of whose opposition and conflict we look for one new man to be gradually formed to the making of peace; from Whom it is that there are gleams of light in every dark and cloudy day, and in every waste place some streaks of verdure.

We worship Thee, O God, "we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord, the Father of an infinite Majesty," and because our discontents with the actual and our aspirations after a more perfect are of Thee, we utter these at Thy feet; because our imposed burdens and labours, duties and troubles, are of Thy appointing, we cry to Thee for guidance with regard to them, and help toward meeting them as we should, so meeting them as to fulfil in our action or endurance the divine idea.

Thou, from Whom we have ears, teach us how to use them for healthy pleasure and to edifying, how amidst the multitude of sounds to lend or refuse them, now listening eagerly, meekly or with patience, and now to vulgar gossip or slanderous whisper keeping them resolutely closed, taking heed how and what we hear.

Thou, from Whom we have eyes, let them rest lovingly on all things fair and beautiful, and be turned away from beholding vanity. Let us not look abroad with them without perceiving, nor suffer them to be jaundiced or dimmed through inward distemper. May no tears of bitterness, of foolish fret or foolish rage defile them, whatever tears of kindly sympathy or tears of sorrow they may know. May they shine with love, even though they may be unable to shine with joy. Cleanse them for the best and finest seeing, and may that which flows into us through their gates, whether of good or evil, be determined always only to wholesome effect by that which it meets within us, even the pure heart whose touch purifies all.

Thou Who meanest us to seek, to seek many things, truth, knowledge, achievement, place, possession, make us to be led always by the spirit of integrity and uprightness, which leads into good lands wherever our journey may end, and may we so seek as to be therein blessed and enriched whatever the issue of our seeking may be. Grant us for the life to which Thou bringest us, with its relations and claims, its trial and perplexity, the untaught wisdom of the single soul, the tact and judgment of holy sensibility, of generous feeling and lofty purpose, and may the fellowship of Christ's sufferings fill us with all good counsel and understanding. Let us not be defrauded of our crown by indolence, nor

hindered from attaining by self-complacency, nor blinded by the action of prejudice, nor made to err through defect of charity. Help us to strive against and seek deliverance from little weaknesses, those little weaknesses of character by which, often, more evil is wrought and more misery caused than by great vices or great crimes; and so clothe us with the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, that we may go through the battle of this mortal day unharmed and undisfigured, and stand, when the sun goes down and the darkness falls, more than conquerors, however scarred.

Blessed be God for all good things; for the eternal laws, for the wonder and beauty of the world, for the struggle of life, for the increase of knowledge, for communion with our own thoughts and with one another, for works of art and works of ministry, for distributions of the Holy Spirit among men of diverse creeds and opinions, for the enthusiasts who rouse us from sleep and the saintly ones who are the salt of the earth, for the search after truth that tires not, for the sacrifices of affection, for lessons learnt from adversity, and songs that are born of grief. Give us to delight always in such things as these, blessing Him for all, Whom we worship now and ever in the faith of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Prayers

(Before Sermon III)

Thou, Who livest and art the strength of our life; out of Whose fulness we are filled; Who art everywhere; something of Whom is in everything; We never turn to look at aught, but we face Thee, never experience aught, but we touch Thee; no little child runs to us without bringing Thee, nor lowly flower blows that does not partake of Thee.

When we go out of doors, into whatever weather, into whatever scene, to meet whatever of adventure or circumstance, may we know that we are in Thy house. When we come within doors to find rest and peace, to be greeted with affection, or to encounter trouble, may we know that Thou art there as our comforter or teacher. When we sit alone in happy or in pensive mood, may we know that Thou art our company. Help us to feel in our pains the shadow of Thy love, in our errors and sins Thy method of instruction; in our punishments the lighting down of Thy mercy; in our accomplishings and successes the work of Thy strength; in our disappointments Thy discipline; in our darkness Thy waiting to shine.

O God! we would fain hear finer tones in the turmoil of life, in the wonder and mystery of the universe, than we are able to hear; we have in us the sense that there are such tones though inaudible to us. We listen, and a voice seems to be saying: "He that hath ears to hear, let

him hear," but no sound of what we imagine must be sounding is heard by us. Speak with us, sometimes, at least, as Thou didst speak with Jacob in the midnight wilderness; with Abraham in the still starlight; with Moses amid the blackness and darkness and tempest until his face shone; with Jesus on the high mount, until He stood transfigured, and even they who were beside Him thought themselves in Heaven.

We thank Thee for songs which happy seers have sung when the radiant vision was theirs, and their hearts overflowed, and for the ministry to us, often, of these recorded songs, when we read them in our hours of trouble, helping, if not to make us glad and jubilant, yet to soften our tears and raise us a little above the level where we lie.

We thank Thee for remembered great words of faith and hope, of worship and praise, in which we find, often, some meet vehicle for the expression of our own feelings, and are enabled to pour out that in us which craves utterance; the very sight and sound of which, when the heart is dull and dry and vacant of the emotion which they breathe, tends to excite it within us, until the words become ours, indeed, as they were not when we began to use them.

Lord, Thou knowest we cannot be always rejoicing in great and beautiful things, as we are ready and prepared to do. There is that

around us of sad and vexing which calls us away from our joy, and will not allow us to indulge it, and it is being always more or less interrupted; we are not permitted to remain in it as we would. Some day, perhaps, in some other world, we may be at liberty to go on unhindered with our contemplation of great and beautiful things, because there will be nothing but the beautiful there. Behold! we know not; we do but dream and wait. Meanwhile, we thank Thee, if we are able at times, when the sad and vexing are round about us, to put these away and forget them in some larger thought, in some meditation of blessed realities, or, perchance, in some absorbing work of love, whereby we return to find them lightened and easier to be borne.

(Before Sermon VIII)

We change and pass, but Thou abidest, in Whom we live and move, and of Whom we are and shall be, though in the place where we are we may no more be found. What is our life but a vapour which soon vanishes away? But the vapour forms and floats upon the everlasting sky, and, vanishing, melts into the sky. What but a bubble? But a bubble upon the deep profound of the pure, eternal course of life, born of that mighty river and dying into closer oneness with it.

We worship down here *toward* Thy holy temple,

looking away from the flats of the actual to the sunlit heights of the ideal; from these low vales and stained fields, to the distant snows so pure, the distant peaks so high; from that which we are to that which is above us, to the beauty which we see only in dream and vision, to the splendour beyond our clouds, to the perfect after which we sigh in vain. But it is *in* Thy temple, also, that we worship, Whose temple we are; God-inhabited, if sometimes devil-haunted; the sacred place of His indwelling, with golden vessels of His gleaming amid our poor furniture, and glory of His hidden behind the veil of our seeming; holding within these narrow bounds of ours something of the transcendent, the infinite.

"The mountains shall bring peace to the people," sang the Hebrew psalmist, and from the everlasting hills of Thy presence may peace come to us—peace, not to our circumstances, but to ourselves, though the circumstances should be troubled. Peace of self-reverence, amidst all our self-discontent; peace from self-will, from perturbing thought and care, from noises of the world and noises in our ears, that grow thin and faint and die away as we ascend in contemplation, and the Spirit from above takes us up. Something, if it might be, of the peace which filled the soul of Jesus, and overflowed from Him upon His disciples, to whom He said "My peace give I unto you."

"Grant, we beseech Thee, merciful Lord, to

Thy faithful people pardon and peace, that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve Thee with a quiet mind, through Jesus Christ our Lord."

We, being creatures, would acknowledge and bow before the Creator, before the power to which we owe our existence, the power that willed and caused us to be, with these natures of ours and in these earthly environments. We are Thine, of Thy determining, and humbly acknowledge it, confessing that our life is rooted in Thee, that " ourselves from Thee we cannot free," that the mystery of ourselves which perplexes us Thou understandest; confessing that, since Thou hast made us, we need Thy guiding, sustaining hand; that since we are made of Thee for development, to grow and become in harmony with Thy purpose must be the one right end for us, and the end most blessed. In order to which we look to Thee for the requisite directing light, that we may know what to seek and how to do; feeling that for such light we have a creaturely claim on Thee, nor doubting that Thou art faithful to answer the claim; that Thou speakest instructingly to the heart, though no voice from above be heard, and leadest us in secret, though we may seem to wander and grope alone; and that we are not untaught of Thee because allowed often to err grievously, or to suffer often baffling darkness. We desire and

would nurse the desire to grow and become in harmony with Thy purpose, for, as Jesus said, "according to your faith be it unto you," and, with creatures formed as we are, Thy teaching must e'en wait for our desire, and can only be duly received as desire opens and prepares the way. And then, though we should think no heavenly vision is granted us, and should say drearily, "Behold, we know not the ends of existence, they have not been declared to our ears"—yet, pursuing our ideal, shall we not surely be learning of Thee in the direction of fulfilling those ends?

We give thanks for the desire awakened and cherished in us to understand what we should do, how we should rule and conduct ourselves towards the progress and consummation of Thy purpose concerning us; and for the faith that, while apparently left to ourselves, One is with us Whom we see not, because of Whom our blind seekings are not wasted or mistaken, our vainest seekings not futile; and that we are being more divinely visited and dealt with and moulded than we know. We give thanks for the light, which, though it be but a beam in the darkness, suffices to show us clearly the duty to be done, the mark to be aimed at, the path to be chosen, and enables us, while asking questions that are never answered, and oppressed by mysteries that are never solved, to find our work for self-culture and for service from day to day.

Prayers

Thou Who art the source and secret of strength, strengthen us for all difficult obedience, for obedience to the law revealed in us, to the Spirit that strives with our flesh; strengthen us with fresh inspirations when the heart is faint and all the wheels of being slow. Strengthen in us the weak will that seeks to enter, and is not able, that cannot do the things that it would. And when, with all our willing, we fall short, take Thou, in Thy merciful justice, the will for the deed. Make us strong to keep our inward composure unruffled by disturbing influences from within; strong with love or greater thoughts to lose ourselves when beset by or exposed to what may tend to make ourselves too much with us; strong for bright work or patient endurance in common hours through occasional tides of the Spirit, temporarily enlarging and uplifting, which, ebbing soon, shall yet leave upon us some heightening and refining effect, like the little pools of sea water left shining on the sand when the sea has retired. And give us to be so strong withal in the grace that was in Christ Jesus that we, too, may have power sometimes to cast out demons from the possessed, be able sometimes to heal and bless with the laying on of our hands.

We thank Thee for whatever of finer strength, strength of quieter faith, of mellower wisdom, of broadened thought, of deepened charity, experience has wrought in us; experience of men and things, of the ways of Providence, of the very truth of

truths that had but our assent before; in the deliverance of truisms from triteness, and their vitalising for us into living realities.

We thank Thee for seasons of retrospect, which bring with them at once whispered lessons from the past and some fresh hope or trust for the future, at once sighs of regret or tears of penitence, and new stirrings to songs of gratitude.

We thank Thee for the years behind us, during which something has been attempted, something done; in which we have enjoyed balmy airs and sunshine, and have passed also under the cloud and through the sea, and in which, while dreams that we nursed have been shattered, our souls have not gone unnurtured.

O God! the days that come to us are Thine, in Whose hands our times are. Let each and all be ours in some ministry of blessing, through our daily consecration in heart to what is good and high.

Thine is this mortal life of ours; let us find in it, through cherishing within us the filial and brotherly heart of Jesus, all the divine discipline and education it is fitted to yield. May we so live it that when, at any time, no light shine on it for us, some light may shine *through* it for others, and we, finishing thus our course at length, be ready to enter upon what Thou mayest have in store for us beyond, of further work, or of deeper rest.

Prayers

(Before Sermon XV)

"My soul cleaveth to the dust," cried the Psalmist, "quicken Thou me, O God, according to Thy word." Even so, as with the saint of old, our soul does sometimes cleave to the dust, waiting and praying, perhaps, for some quickening word to be borne in upon us. If so we cleave as we would not, send to us, Lord, some word of Thine that shall leave us quickened as we would be, Thou Whose breath quickens dead things of the field or raises dead things under the clod into light and ampler air. "Many that sleep in the dust shall rise," says the promise, "to the heavens that spread above us." May we be partakers of such blessed resurrection; lift us from our low lying, as the keeper of the vineyard, going his round, lifts some creeping branch of the vine that the tempest has bent. Lift us above any thought that weighs on our wings and hampers us for flight. Lift us now from any sad moods to loftier ones, that we may begin to-day at the height of a prayer that shall leave a hidden effect upon all the day. Purify us for prayer, that in the bath of prayer we may grow pure. Help us to worship in the beauty of holiness, that some beauty of holiness may appear upon us.

Lord, draw us *near* in spirit, near to the beatific vision that might be enjoyed, near to the impressions which it is good and healthening and purifying to receive, near to the kindling touch of those things from on high which do but wait our

accessibility to be felt, near to the lustre which does but hide itself till we are ready and prepared to see, near to the beauty and wonder in common things, the sight of which is withheld only from those whose eyes are holden, near to the inspirations from which only the temper of our own mind may exclude us. Thou Whose offspring we are and Whose fulfilling we shall be, as we become self-fulfilled, Whose are these times of ours, happy or sad, and the times before us and the times to follow; from Whom comes man, suffering and sinning, that through suffering and sin he may enter into his glory; of Whom are all the sons of men in long succession, suffering, aspiring, inventing, loving, in their long conflict between animalism and the spiritual, in their thoughts that wander through eternity, and their discontents. We thank Thee for all the joy of life, and for all its smarts, for the luxury of hope, dying and living again, for the thrills and blisses of affection with its sighs and pains, for the endless search after truth, the growth of knowledge which makes rich and increases sorrow, and for stray stirrings of the ideal. We thank Thee for those who have fought a good fight, and are quietly waiting at the close of their days, and for the warm blood of those before whom the long years lie in which to live and love, work and do battle. We thank Thee for those whom repeated trials have mellowed, and for the promise of those whose promise has yet to be tried in the fire,

from which may it come forth as gold purified. We thank Thee for the caution of the elders and the impetuosity of the young, for the prowess of the hero, for the grace of the nobly self-sacrificing, for the work of those who labour and the zeal of those who try to serve, and for the tears of those who weep with them that weep. May wisdom guide always the councils of those who aim to set right the wrong about them, to attempt redemption for such as are bound. May those who crave for justice have justice done them, and those oppressed obtain deliverance, nor may the cause of such be hindered by injudicious action on their behalf. Give us light and help in dealing with the many social problems which cry for solution. Spirit of Wisdom, pity our blunders, make us wise and wiser, if only through the pressure and pain of our folly and its resilient penalties. Spirit of Liberty, teach us to seek and keep inward freedom, the freedom which might be ours if we would, of which none can deprive us, that of self-control, of just thought and wide sympathy, freedom from bondage to false ideals and low impulses and the clogging of petty cares, from whatever would hinder our discernment of the truth that waits to be seen. Spirit of Love, enlighten us with Thy breathing within, overcoming our selfish inclinations, leading us, as we come increasingly under Thy gracious sway and governance, to be free to follow our own hearts and to do what we like.

Thou, in Whose world we live and Whose offspring we are, we ask Thee for grace to fill well our place, so to fill it as to be of some use, whether able to perceive the service rendered or not, yet out of a good heart leaving behind us some subtle influence for good when our place knows us no more. Help us to do our best with the scope afforded us, with the opportunities and advantages that fall to our share, and to grow healthful and prosperous beneath the impact of the circumstances in our lot, putting forth the full fruit of all goodly germs within us, and advancing by degrees to the measure of the stature of the perfect man. May He be formed in us Whom we own as pattern and confess as Lord, to reproduce some of Whose spiritual features is to be of certain use and beauty. May our spirit be always true, whether in joy or sorrow, in work or play, behind laughter or tears, and our love abide even when faith may fail, and always peace be ours, not the peace of outward circumstances, though this is good to have, but the inward peace, that serenity of soul which tends to clearness of vision, and helps to sustain in all well-doing.

(On Sunday after King Edward's Death)

Thou, Who raisest up to altitude and power, and castest down to weakness and destruction; Who givest us richly to our thankfulness, and

takest away what has been given to our trouble and grief, pitifully behold the sorrows of our heart and those of a vast multitude of people, sorrowing because to-day a great man and a prince has fallen in our Israel, because from this Kingdom and Empire to-day has been taken its head, and his high place, so wisely, worthily and beneficently filled, shall know him no more; whose removal from the scene leaves us bereaved and the world bereaved with us of a great potency for good, grieving for the country's loss —unspeakable at the present juncture of affairs when he was so sorely needed—of the eminent man in whom was the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might. Help us to hold our peace, from complaining, if not from sighing, because Thou hast done it, and may the loss be sanctified somehow to us and to the nation, and the noble example of royal loyalty and devotion be followed by him on whose behalf while mourning "the King is dead" we raise our voices and cry, "Long live the King!" And may support and comfort be given to the widowed Queen and to all the members of the royal family, as we pray it may be given to all and any to-day, who, in bereaved homes, lament for the voice that is still and the empty chair; to those of our friends from whom is taken just now a valued life, a dear presence, and they say one to another, tearfully, "So good, so kind, and he is gone!"

Into all houses visited by Death may there enter the sacred angel of divine consolation, to sustain and calm.

(Before Sermon XVIII)

O God the Eternal, from everlasting to everlasting, Whose years fail not, when the good and great fail from among us—the mighty together with the weak, the high together with the lowly, are alike laid in the dust—help us to remember with Israel's singer "the years of the right hand of the Most High," the years that endure throughout all ages, and say to ourselves "the Lord liveth in Whom we live and move and have our being," the Lord not of the dead but of the living, since all live to Him. Lord, whatever may be wanted or missed, Thou art with us; with us when we commune with friends by the way and are glad, and with us when the friends have departed; with us when alone in the midst of the crowd, and, in that greatest of all solitudes, art sometimes the best company, a blissful company, indeed, when we can say with Jesus, "Though ye all forsake me, yet the Father will be with me"; a sure divine company, if unfelt when with Him we cry for the moment, "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" A pillar of cloud by day, a pillar of fire by night—and was that but a people's dream? yet the dream was a shadow of the reality, for we are always

divinely beset and encompassed; Thou art with us when leaders fall, in all time of our mourning, because the mighty, in whom we trusted, are brought low from their seats. Help us then to rejoice, and if we cannot, by reason of heaviness, help us to be still, because the Eternal is our refuge and underneath are the everlasting arms. Make Thyself inwardly visible to the sorrowful, whether in the palace or the cottage, in poor homes where the breadwinner is gone, or in the Royal home where the widowed Queen sits bearing her sorrow, and with her a great multitude, sorrowing too.

Now, still our souls before Thee, O God, Thou infinite greatness, source of power and life; still our souls before Thee with the stillness of lowly reverence and wise filial trust, and with the silence that is the stillness left through the going out from us of the noisy, vexed, restless self-life beneath the inflow of the spirit, which is surrender to the universal will, to the highest law. May we look up to the order which changes not, to the wisdom that cannot be mistaken and rules all, to the Father of Whom it is that we are and shall be, and Whose way is perfect, and, as we look up, grow calm, with a sense of our divine relationship, who yet are related to the dust; with a sense of being, not in our own hands, but Thine. May we be able to feel the secret, unseen beauty of whatever is inevitable

in life, as expressing Thy will, and, consenting to it without useless chafe or vain rebellion, find in it all the good that it hides. Fill us with the trust that is not slothful but strenuous, which, while quiet from anxious care, is earnest in labour, the repose of which means courage and strength; and may we escape from all bondage to petty interests and petty regards, into wide sympathy, into the liberty of living to obey and love. Lord, let us not miss, through wandering from our place, or failing to occupy it, any divine visions that should have been ours. Thou meetest him who rejoiceth and worketh righteousness in the way; Thou art where our duty lies, be it ever so small and lowly; there let us seek to receive Thee, nor dream we shall find Thee in any temple, in any word or work while we are aloof from it. Thy commandment is pure before us; following it may we grow daily in understanding and discernment, and be saved from the dimness of sight which undutifulness brings.

O God, we suffer much of evil which we would not, but surely it is right and well, and the cloud of suffering has its bright side, were we only large-eyed enough to see it. For if aught *be* ruling—and do we not feel always and everywhere the reign of law—it must needs be justice, not less than that of which we can conceive and are constrained to aim at, and goodness, not less than that of which we dream and at our best exemplify, and benevolence, not less than that

which we admire in our noblest but more; so we climb to the highest summit of ourselves, of the human, and from thence behold Thee as the perfection of that goodness, justice, benevolence, of which we, at our best, are dim signs, far-off reflections. O Father of Lights, help us to believe and be sure that Thou art always blessing us in all things, in our emptiness as well as in our fulness, in all time of our tribulation as well as in all time of our wealth, nor may we ever lose the blessing which is lodged for us in aught, through unbelief or hardness of heart, but, as the grain of corn sends down to the darkness beneath—life, which we call root, and up to the sun above—life, which we call leaf and flower, may we be sure that all that we find, gracious and grievous alike, means the same thing, the judgment and mercy of God. Show us light to mitigate for us our dark times. Cheer us on the way, when it is hard to travel. Give us the light of the instruction that waits to be received from any circumstances in our personal lot, or any great tragic events of the day. Illumine our hearts with the heart perception, with the insight of faith, with the clear-sightedness of the pure conscience, with the intuitive understanding of love unfailing, to which revelations are made, withheld from those full of eyes and of learning, who may be wanting in it. Give Thy support to those bowed beneath a heavy weight of sorrow, whose houses are

darkened with sore calamity or sudden bereavement; give light to all those who govern and legislate, and to the new King, for the high calling to which he is called, for the heavy task laid upon him; and leave not our nation without light, but lead us on from things behind to those that are before, though stars may fall and the powers of heaven be shaken.

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